

KAROL JANICKI

# **ELEMENTS of BRITISH and AMERICAN ENGLISH**



PAŃSTWOWE WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE

Karol Janicki

ELEMENTS OF  
BRITISH AND AMERICAN  
ENGLISH



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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

- BE — British English
- AE — American English
- M — it means
- s* — separable phrasal verb
- ins* — inseparable phrasal verb
- sth* — something
- ' — primary stress
- ` — secondary stress
- / / — optional; in chapters III and IV—disregarded in alphabetic arrangement of the expression
- \* — incorrect (not in current educated use)

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Karol Janicki

The present manual discusses in a systematic way the differences and similarities between British and American English. It is intended primarily for secondary school teachers of English but can also be recommended to secondary school and university students, or practically anybody with a relatively good command of English. Before a detailed discussion of the peculiarities of British and American English is attempted, the origin of American English will be briefly accounted for. In the presentation proper, the following areas will be taken into account: *pronunciation, stress, intonation, spelling, vocabulary, phraseology, grammar, and morphology*. Within each of these fields similarities will be pointed out, differences discussed, and the most striking dissimilarities purposely emphasized. This discussion will be limited to a presentation only of current differences with sporadic references to the historical development of the two varieties of English. Slang expressions will be avoided, the actual investigation being confined to literary and colloquial British and American English. The script appended to the manual includes instances of pronunciation, stress and intonation. It is hoped that all of the examples recorded here will serve as a good illustration of differences pertaining to the sound systems of the two varieties.

## INTRODUCTION

### a) Why this book was written?

The idea of writing this book arose as a result of difficulties that most secondary school English teachers face in their daily work. The problem they have to wrestle with involves various questions that students ask concerning a number of what they call "inconsistencies", these being nothing but differences between British and American usage or occasionally differences within one of these varieties.

All the handbooks that have been available in Poland for primary and secondary school teaching have been England-oriented, i. e., recommended pronunciations, vocabulary and other relevant components have been British. Furthermore, cultural references made from time to time either in the reading material or in classroom activities have never been taken from across the ocean. For a number of reasons England has always been the country of reference for the majority of people from non-English-speaking lands who have been concerned with English. This, however, is not unreasonable since English has, after all, its roots in the British Isles and has been spoken there for many centuries. Also, the superior prestige of the English tradition is an important factor.

Having been transplanted to other continents, the English language developed along different lines in



various places. The linguistic ramifications which were brought into being as a natural result of these changes started showing a split of forms and usages of the language.

It seems that our secondary school materials will be for a great many years based on British materials. This will definitely determine the choice of words introduced during classroom instruction and the pronunciation model to be followed by the students. On the other hand, the student is, and will be more and more, exposed to the English language as spoken in America. This seems to be so since much of the reading material that the student is likely to encounter may come from America. Moreover, the tourist boom and movie exchange enable the student to apply his knowledge acquired in class. The number of American expressions that reach the student in everyday life situations has begun to grow very rapidly. It therefore seems advisable to provide a handbook which can help both the teacher and the student.

The secondary school student, who ordinarily has no theoretical linguistic training, has absolutely no idea how languages operate, what laws govern them, and how differences within one or between two languages come about through historical changes. Such a lack of knowledge at this level of education, resulting in the misconception of many phenomena, is likely to confuse the student who may either reach the wrong conclusion or become totally uninterested. The teacher, when asked questions concerning the existence of various forms, usage, or distribution of a linguistic item is not always able to give a sufficient and satisfactory response.

As for British and American English, no book is as yet available for the kind of audience that the present volume is intended for. For this reason it is hoped that

the following presentation of differences and similarities between BE and AE will prove useful both to secondary school teachers and the many students who are interested in the subject.

## **b) The origin of American English**

The origin of many modern languages that have been reduced to writing can be traced back and their historical development may be described, at least for a few hundred years, and in some cases for much longer. In order to be able to account for the majority of forms, the pronunciation patterns, or the syntactic arrangements of a given language one has to be well acquainted with the various processes which have operated in that language. Moreover, a detailed and appropriate description of a linguistic form often calls for a vast knowledge of cultural, economic, and political background as well as the general environment that the language under consideration has been operating in.

Because AE has not gained the status of a separate language, it is best referred to as a distinct variety of English differing from the language spoken in Britain with respect to a great number of features.

Some people are prone to exaggerate the differences by stating that the discrepancies are so numerous as to bring about a lack of intelligibility. This is without question a far-fetched statement since Americans can easily communicate with the English people unless a speaker happens to select vocabulary that makes a single sentence incomprehensible. Such a situation, even though rare in normal communication, can be very easily handled simply by the paraphrasing or restructuring of the sentence. Discrepancies in pronunciation never cause real misunderstanding.

At this point some definitions of the status of AE must be set forth. Is it a dialect of English, is it a different language? People have answered this question in a number of ways. The answer has very often been that it is a dialect, but this has definitely been the result of a misconception of the term. For our purposes, the term variety is most proper, and it will be used throughout this work referring to the English language as spoken in the United States. The phrase American variety of English will thus imply the language spoken in the United States with its geographically, politically and economically conditioned characteristics.

One should not forget, however, that there also exist other varieties of English like Australian English, New Zealand English, South African English and British English, whose pertinent features also show a strict relation between the forms of the language and the peculiar conditions that the language is exposed to. Thus, it can be concluded that the different varieties of English like AE, BE, Canadian English etc., have national identities whereas the English language as such does not.

The universality of the process can be easily understood when instances from other languages are cited. The Spanish language spoken in Spain differs to a certain extent from that used in South America. The French language spoken in France reveals a considerable number of differences from the variety spoken in Canada. German spoken as the native language in GDR, FRG, Austria and Switzerland also discloses many dissimilarities. Examples like these could be multiplied.

In order to understand better the origin of the differences between BE and AE and in particular the uniqueness of the American variety we must have some notion of the historical development of the nation

and its speech. Once the facts of the political, economic, geographical and possibly religious life of Americans have been taken into consideration, many of the linguistic mysteries and misstatements become immediately clear.

One of the most significant dates in the history of America is the arrival of the first group of colonists and the immediately ensuing events that contribute to a large extent to and affect in many respects the nature of both American society and the language as spoken by most of the members of the society.

Led by Captain John Smith, the first party of extremely courageous English-speaking people stepped on the American continent in 1607. Not all of the original 120 venturers succeeded in seeing the shores of America. Sixteen of them died during the voyage. The first colony that came into being in the "Promised Land" was that of Virginia. Undoubtedly, the establishing of Jamestown, Virginia, was the laying of the cornerstone for a large common home for the many people who found it advisable to leave their homeland.

After the first settlers had reached America and gradually had adjusted themselves to the new environment, it turned out that the New Land could give food and refuge to millions of people who were brave enough to take the risk of going to the unknown. The majority of the people fleeing from Europe to make a better living in America were Englishmen who for a number of reasons decided to leave their mother country. These considerations were mainly economic, political and religious. The land offered them freedom of various kinds but also a great deal of predictable or unpredictable danger whose actual nature not all of the settlers realized and foresaw.

Because of religious persecution large groups of venturers crossed the ocean after the first successful Mayflower voyage had been made in 1620. Ten years after the Mayflower colonists, the so-called Pilgrims, settled in Plymouth, there arrived a different group of Puritans who established the Massachusetts Bay Company. They made their home in Salem and later in the vicinity of Boston. The Massachusetts Bay Company was very influential for a long period of time. It constituted the leading power of the colony's political and economic life.

More and more people kept coming. This required the establishment of certain institutions both political and economic (possibly also social) which could function appropriately in order to keep the new society running smoothly. This, in turn, involved the legalization of various institutions and the setting up of a number of laws and regulations which would determine the way these entities would operate.

As has already been mentioned, people went to America seeking and hoping to find there the freedom which they did not have in their mother country. However, as they had predicted, they had to face other problems which were generally of two kinds.

One was that of economic dependence on Britain which considered America to be just a colony, treating it only as a source of raw materials. The British government desired that ready-made products should be imported from England. All the same, regardless of what British wishes were, the colonists began their own manufacturing. This brought about much apprehension in the British Isles which finally resulted in certain measures that the British government decided to take.

In order to prevent or stop the Americans' progress toward economic independence, the British authorities

decided to send over some of their troops, allegedly to protect the colonists against Indian assaults. This stimulated an immediate response on the part of many: *we want you to go back.*

On September 5, 1774, as a definite manifestation of the common complaints, the colonists gathered at the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. A few months later, the first groups of American soldiers were ready to face the British army in a military battle. The fights that were in the beginning confined to Massachusetts very quickly spread to the remaining colonial territories.

The other danger or hardship that the colonists were exposed to was of an entirely different kind. It was created by the natural conditions that the newcomers encountered in the new land. They were faced with many plants and animals that they had never seen before and with large stretches of land that they had no idea how to cultivate.

The Indians gave them also trouble. The methods that the desperate colonists used to survive in the wilderness were sometimes not acceptable to the Indians who did not always want to let strangers into their territory. Although the early history of the American nation records sporadic acts of friendship between the colonists and the Indians, more records of animosity and hostility can be found in the annals. The Indians, foreseeing the peril of their land and waters being taken away from them, were always ready to defend their only sources of food supply. The confrontation of a strong feeling of ownership and an even stronger need for survival resulted in a great number of conflicts between Indians and the colonists whose ranks were weakened by famine.

All in all, the new environment to which the colonists

were confined undoubtedly exerted a considerable impact on the various aspects of the further development of American society. This holds perfectly true in the realm which is of interest to us — the language.

The divergence of linguistic forms between the English spoken in America and that spoken in Britain, was initiated as a natural result of the language being spoken by the two distant groups of people whose language operated in different social conditions.

One of the facts recorded about the American variety of English is the preservation of older linguistic forms that in Britain under the operation of various laws were transformed to others, e. g., the retention of the flat *a* as in *fast*, *grass*, and *pass* which became the broad *a* in the English spoken in the British Isles. The pronunciation of *bird* is another example. Also, some vocabulary items were replaced in England by different words whereas in America they have been in current use until the present time. The word *fall* (British: *autumn*) serves as a good example.

Moreover, what reshaped the language in America were the specific natural conditions already mentioned. The previously unknown animals, plants, and objects had to be given some names, hence Indian borrowings like: *sequoia*, *pecan*, *raccoon*, *woodchuck*, *moose*; Spanish: *mustang*, *tortilla*, and many others. The list of loanwords is quite extensive (they will be given in a more complete form later) since borrowing words from languages which already had names for unknown objects was both helpful and convenient.

Another contribution to the remodeling of the English language in America was that caused by social, political, and economic arrangements of the new society. The specific American conditions determined to a large extent the structure of the new government

story, these discrepancies turn out to be historically conditioned and naturally produced.

On the other hand, another thing to be aware of is that the phonetic changes which operated on BE after the colonists had left England were not transmitted and did not affect the sound system of the English language in America. The American final and preconsonantal *r* sound (present in many American dialects) which was dropped in BE exemplifies the point. The differences conspicuous at present between BE and AE in the areas of syntax; *morphology*, *spelling* and *intonation* spring from other sources and will be discussed later in detail.

A. H. Marckwardt points out in his book *American English* (1958):

Considered from the point of view of vocabulary, there are few 'pure' languages. English has been notorious as a word borrower, but it is safe to say that every one of the Western European tongues has supplemented its word stock by adoptions from other languages.

Later he says:

One great impetus toward word borrowing arises from the necessity of talking about new things, qualities, operations, concepts and ideas. Inevitably the movement of a people to a markedly different environment not only creates a problem of communication but makes it urgent.

The inevitability of word borrowing mentioned in the cited passage made the colonists seek linguistic resources in the surrounding linguistic environment which was confined to the Indians and colonists coming from countries other than England either before or after the first English voyages across the ocean had taken place.

Among the languages which played a very important role in the forming of AE were the Indian languages,



French, Spanish, Dutch and German. Since some of the small "branches" of these tongues seemed to have merged with the huge "tree" of English to yield one language, Professor Marckwardt refers to this phenomenon metaphorically and at the same time very appropriately as "the melting pot".

In the list of vocabulary items which have been selected to illustrate borrowings, only those words are included which seem to be current in general American speech, but it is inevitable that words will be listed which may be known or more often heard only in some parts of the US.

The list of words taken from the Indian languages includes, according to Mencken, almost 150 items of which over thirty survive today.

Let us quote some examples: *pecan, moccasin, racoon, totem, toboggan, Catalpa, hickory, sequoia, squash, tamarac, woodchuck, tomahawk, kayak, moose, mugwump, chinook, menhaden*.

As can be seen, the list of Indian borrowings contains botanical terms, the names of animals, names of fish, cultural and political terms, and other miscellaneous items.

A list of French borrowings will include examples like: *pumpkin, praline, prairie, chute, bureau, depot, chowder, cent, dime*, and others.

The existence of French elements in English is due, among other reasons, to the contact with the French when the westward expansion was taking place. The colonists' coming into such contact was linguistically relevant to the same extent that the impact of New Orleans was — the center of French influence in the United States.

Spanish influence in AE can be perceived particularly in the South, since when moving southward

toward the Gulf of Mexico the English colonists were exposed to Spanish, which had been spread over the South long before the people of the Mayflower disembarked.

Some of the previously adopted Spanish words are now extinct in English; however, the body of terms in current use is still vast: *marijuana, cockroach, coyote, mustang, sombrero, lasso, hacienda, wrangler, cafeteria, pueblo, bonanza, canyon, sierra, filibuster, rumba, tornado*, etc.

Although the Dutch influence in America was not long-lasting (New Amsterdam was captured by the English in 1664), certain Dutch expressions made their way through the linguistic "crowd" and gained for themselves a fixed place in the English vocabulary. The following serve as examples: *spook, Santa Claus, dope, yankee, boodle, coleslaw*.

The list of German loanwords in AE is also quite extensive. Since the German immigration groups began coming to America as late as the end of the seventeenth century (the first flocks) and then in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century, most of the words listed below were adopted into English long after the first Indian, Dutch and French items had been adopted.

The list includes words like: *delicatessen, frankfurter, hamburger, noodle, pretzel, pumpernickel, kraut, wiener, seminar*, etc.

Each of the lists of English words of foreign origin could be easily expanded, but the difficulty to be wrestled with is the problem of which items to include and which to omit. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that an item chosen at random from one of the quoted lists of borrowings might be well known to a speaker from California but entirely alien to a speaker from New York or Florida.

This short and by no means detailed survey of the linguistic "melting pot" brings to light the fact that it was mainly the vocabulary of AE which was influenced by foreign tongues. The languages which have been mentioned hardly affected the phonological and the syntactic components of the language. Differences in grammar between BE and AE which are discernable at the present moment are not due to foreign influence. Two more points must be stressed:

1. Some of the terms quoted as borrowings are wholly or partly loan translations rather than direct original form adoptions, e. g., *saw buck* may have been derived from either Dutch *zaagbock* or German *Sägebock*. Very likely, both of the languages had a hand in establishing this form. Another example could be explanation of the etymology of the word *yankee*, as suggested by Marckwardt:

At least twenty different etymologies have been proposed for that most typically American of all words, 'Yankee', but among these the most credible seems to be Dutch Jan Kees 'John Cheese', a term applied to the New Englanders somewhat contemptuously, or at least patronizingly. This was mistaken for a plural by the English-speaking colonists and a new singular 'Yankee' was derived through the process of back-formation<sup>1</sup>.

2. Most of the borrowings were adopted into English after their phonetic form had been assimilated to the sound patterns of English e. g., German *hamburger* [hamburge], American [hæmbɜːɡɜː]. Later, *hamburger* had been adopted by BE from AE, (not directly from German).

The investigation presented above of some of the basic facts of early American history and the various factors that influenced the form of the English language spoken in America throws some light upon the sources

of the presently existing differences between the two varieties of English.

Before a thorough comparison between the two kinds of English is attempted, still one more issue has to be raised, namely, the establishing of the limits within which what is referred to as Standard British and Standard American will be introduced and discussed.

### c) Standard British and Standard American

Thus we have arrived at the point where the questions *What is Standard British?* and *What is Standard American?* are very often asked.

The first of these is easier to handle since what is usually referred to as Standard British is the language spoken by the BBC radio announcers; in terms of geographical location and social status — the language of the educated class of people centered in London and the vicinity of the city. Also the territory south of London is often included in the "Standard British area".

American English, however, presents much more trouble. The difficulty in stating what Standard American is results primarily from three causes:

1. the immense size of the country that comprises the fifty American states,
2. the linguistic mixture of many European languages which influenced the American English word stock in one way or another,
3. the existence of many socially established varieties of AE which can by no means be denied the status of standard.

Furthermore, irrespective of what dialectal division of the country is suggested, each dialect is charac-

terized by features which occasionally (and some of them consistently) overlap another area. For example; *r* in *car*, *bar* and before consonants is lost both in the eastern New England dialect and in the Southern dialect. Therefore when asked the question *What is Standard American?* a native of America usually racks his brain before even attempting to answer. For our purposes, it seems most adequate to define the term *Standard American* as the language combining features which can be detected in the speech of the majority of educated speakers all over the territory of the United States. The term *American English* (or rather *Standard American English*) will be used in this sense throughout this book.

Two other frequently used terms (when a comparison of British and American English is attempted) are *Americanism* and *Briticism*. Therefore it seems very advisable to point out in what sense these two terms might be referred to in this volume.

The first definition of *Americanism* was given by John Witherspoon in 1781<sup>2</sup>. It ran as follows: "... ways of speaking peculiar to this country". Pickering, in turn, divided *Americanisms* into three categories:

1. We have formed some new words
2. To some old ones, that are still used in England, we have affixed new significations
3. Others, which have been long obsolete in England, are still retained in common use among us<sup>3</sup>.

These definitions have been quoted only to demonstrate two of the various meanings assigned to the term. For our purposes, the terms *Americanism* and *Briticism* will be applied to linguistic items in exclusive usage in *Standard American* and *Standard British*, respectively.

A fair number of features of AE can be perceived in some dialects spoken in the British Isles, particularly in the northern part of the country. On the other hand, certain features (especially phonetic) of Standard BE can be discovered in the speech of many Americans, e. g., the eastern area of New England. Furthermore, the infiltration of BE by Americanisms became very evident in the nineteenth century and particularly in the twentieth century.

A great number of words which were originally American made their way into BE. In the nineteenth century words like *caucus* and *lobby* began to be used in BE. Some of the early Americanisms that got into BE have become so thoroughly naturalized that the British dictionaries no longer mark them as alien.

Because of tourist mobility of the American and British people, the exchange of press, literature, the movie industry, TV, and other factors it is very often difficult to state if a particular item is British or American. It can rarely be agreed upon that a word or an expression (sound differences are more evident and easier to handle) is purely American or British. When foreign informants are approached and asked to give their opinion concerning the usage of a word or phrase their answer often is *Perhaps I would use it but it is rare* or *I would not use it but I have heard it*. This applies to both British and American speakers when approached about an item concerning the other variety.

For this reason the differences and similarities suggested in this handbook may be favored by some native speakers of either British or American English and strongly opposed by others. This fact seems inevitable. Sharing an opinion or disagreeing with it when a practical linguistic point is considered is a universal

law and it can be easily tested when examples from other tongues are discussed.

Despite the heavy American influence which has been exerted on BE in recent years, the two varieties of English show a considerable number of differences. The English often use different words for the same common objects; they make frequent use of words and phrases that are seldom or never heard in America. They use different sounds in their speech. They have a different repertoire of obscenities.

We now proceed to a discussion of the peculiarities of Standard British and Standard American, as discernible in the fields of pronunciation, intonation, stress, spelling, vocabulary, phraseology, grammar and morphology.

# PRONUNCIATION, STRESS AND INTONATION

## I. Pronunciation

A considerable number of divergencies between BE and AE can be detected in the area of pronunciation. In the present survey the following elements of the sound system of English will be discussed: vowels, diphthongs, consonants and semivowels.

### VOWELS

It is very important to note at this point that the discrepancies between BE and AE pertaining to the vocalic system result from different distribution of particular vowels in either variety rather than from qualitative or quantitative differences. This point can be very well illustrated if British and American English vowels are contrasted when placed in the Cardinal Vowel Chart. Fig. 1 presents the vowel areas, i. e., the possible extreme positions that the tongue can assume to produce any vowel. Those vowels (in any language) which are made with the tongue approaching the palate are referred to as **high**. When the tongue, is lowered it passes through the mid area. Vowels produced with such placement of the tongue are called **mid**. With the placement of the tongue at the bottom of the oral cavity **low** vowels are made. Thus vowels which are produced with these various positions of



the tongue will be referred to as **high**, **mid** and **low**, respectively.

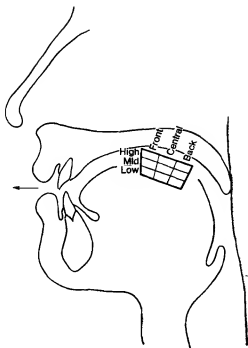


Fig. 1\*

The shifting of the tongue from the extreme front position to the extreme back position will yield **front**, **central** and **back** vowels, respectively. It must be kept in mind that the positions indicated in Fig. 1 do not refer to English vowels only but to any vowel that can be produced in any language.

The vowels which are made with the tongue assuming the above-mentioned extreme positions are often referred to as Cardinal Vowels and the chart in which

they are placed is the so-called Cardinal Vowel Chart. Vowels which belong to the sound system of particular languages show various deviations from the cardinal scheme. Fig. 2 shows in a conventional way the positions of the tongue for both British and American English vowels.

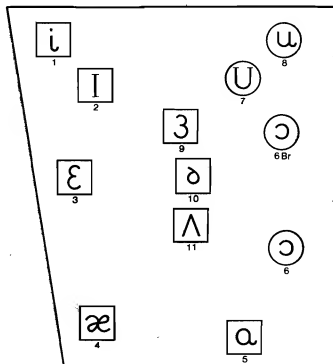


Fig. 2

Each square represents the very approximate position and some of the possible range of variation for the highest point of the tongue in making an English unrounded vowel. Similarly each circle represents a vowel made with some degree of rounding of the lips. Vowel 6

Br suggests that in the British variety of English the long variant of this vowel is produced with the tongue much more raised than in the case of its American counterpart. Vowel quantity (long or short) is not marked in the diagram. References to length variations will be made only in the case of vowels 5, *a* and 6, *ɔ*.

As can be seen, vowel quality differences between BE and AE are very slight and in fact are limited to only one vowel as shown in Fig. 2 (although marked *ɔ*, the distinction concerns long *ɔ*:). Even this divergence becomes less evident when instances from various dialects are quoted.

Vowel differences between BE and AE are exhibited basically in the distribution of particular vowels.

1. *i* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like:  
*see, bee, lead, speed, bead, read, seed, breed, bleed, creed;*
2. *ɪ* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like:  
*sit, bit, did, lid, bid, kid;*
3. *ɛ* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like:  
*set, get, ten, red, bed, said, dead;*
4. *æ* — there is a long list of words in both BE and AE that employ the vowel *æ*, e. g., *cat, bat, mat, rat, sat, bad.*

However, a large number of words that retain *æ* in AE show the *a* vowel in BE (this difference did not exist until the eighteenth century), e. g.; *plant, grass, dance, cast, command, chance, advance, can't, aunt, path, pass, past, half, fast, last, after, answer, ask, bath, grant, draft, grasp, glance, blast, brass.*

The number of words in which the Americans employ the flat *æ* whereas the British the broad *ɑ* is estimated to be around 150 items<sup>6</sup>. This difference can be discovered before *f*, *s*, *θ*, and *n* followed by certain consonants.

5. *ɑ* — in BE in words like those that have just been quoted, in most types of AE the short variety of *ɑ* occurs in words like:

*box, stop, rod, God, pot, not, top, bottom, got, lock, hot, lot, plot, dollar, college, doctor, rock, obvious, body, common, conflict, nod, novel, bother, slot, shot;*

it is long in *father*, sometimes in *rather* and before *r*, as in *car* and *garden*. In BE instead of the short *ɑ* the short *ɔ* occurs.

6. *ɔ* — the short variety of *ɔ* occurs in BE in words in which AE usually has a short variety of *ɑ* (see vowel 5)

- ɔ:* — the long variety of *ɔ* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like:

*all, saw, bought, taught, talk, law, ball, call, raw, draw, fall, hall, tall, yawn, bawl, lawn, paw, claw, broad, strawberry, coleslaw.*

However, the British variety of *ɔ:* is produced with the tongue much more raised (as indicated in the diagram) and the lips more rounded.

7. *ʊ* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like:  
*book, cook, look, would, should, took, put, hood.*

8. *u* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like:  
*move, groovy, grew, boot, booth, room, lose.*

In fact, in a number of words spelled with *oo*, the vowel sound may be either *u* or *ʊ* : *room*, *broom*, *roof*, etc.

9. *ɜ* — in AE it is attributed the feature *r*-colored (the *r* sound will be discussed later) and occurs in both varieties in words like: *blurr*, *curb*, *bird*, *curve*, *turn*, *learn*, *burn*, *lurk*, *third*.
10. *ə* — similarly to *ɜ* in AE in words that have an *r* in the spelling, *ə* has an *r*-coloring. It is always unstressed and occurs initially, medially and finally in words like: *alone*, *ago*, *arose*, *container*, *teacher*, *father*, *mother*, *brother*, *better*.
11. *ʌ* — occurs in both BE and AE in words like: *but*, *cut*, *erupt*, *destruction*, *come*. In AE in some words instead of this vowel the central vowel *ɜ* is used e. g., *worry*, *hurry*, *courage*, *current*, *curry*, *flurry*, *surrey*.

Having surveyed all the English vowels and having exemplified all the possible occurrences of particular vowels it becomes easy to establish a list of items which will single out some of the most significant differences that the distribution of vowels exhibits.

1. — AE *æ* versus BE *ɑ*, e. g.: *pass*, *bath*, *grass*
2. — AE *ɑ* versus BE *ɔ*, e. g.: *pot*, *red*, *got*
3. — AE *ɔ*: (low) versus BE *ɔ*: (much higher and more rounded), e. g.: *all*, *saw*, *law*, *ball*
4. — AE central vowels *ɜ* and *ɝ* (*r*-colored) versus BE non-colored *ɜ* and *ə*.

Other vocalic discrepancies will be pointed out later since they pertain not only to vowels but also semi-vowels and diphthongs.

## DIPHTHONGS

Diphthongs (combinations of two vowels or a vowel and a semivowel) show fewer dissimilarities than the vowels do. The most frequent diphthongs occurring in both BE and AE are the following:

1. **eɪ** as in *cake, late, mate*
2. **aɪ** as in *might, bite, right*
3. **aʊ** as in *now, out, shout*
4. **ɔɪ** as in *oil, Joyce, boy*
5. **ɪə / ɛ /** as in *here, beer, dear*
6. **ʊə / ʊ /** as in *tour, sure, lure*

The diphthong which occurs in words like: *broke, coke, going, soak*, differs in BE and AE, **əʊ** and **ou** being used respectively. Many more examples may be quoted: *poker, rope, dope, thrown, abode, load, no, nose, code, low, wrote, lonely, alone, quote, note, remote*, etc. Thus it can be seen that in the case of diphthongs it is not distribution but quality that contributes to the differences. Americans are very consistent in using the **ou** diphthong in the words cited above. Many English speakers, however, seem to tend to use occasionally also **ou**, although **əʊ** definitely has the priority.

In a number of words AE more or less consistently uses the monophthong **ɪ** or **ə** where BE has the diphthong **aɪ**. The following serve as instances: *specialization, generalization, civilization, characterization, crystallization, nasalization, fertile, hostile, futile, agile, fragile, mobile*. In the last six examples the vowel in question may be entirely dropped yielding syllabic **ɪ**.

On the other hand, there is a vast body of words in which the reverse phenomenon can be observed. Weakly stressed or unstressed monophthongs in BE correspond to diphthongs in AE. The following will serve as examples:

	AE	BE
simultaneously	salmiltéinjəsɪ	sɪmlténjəsɪ
acrimony	ækrimovni	ækriməni
albino	ælbáinov	ælbínəv
anti- (prefix)	ántaɪ-	ántɪ-
candidate	kændədelt	kændədɪt
brocade	broukéɪd	brəkéɪd

Another characteristic American feature is that of using the monophthong *u* instead of the diphthong *ju*. This is true most often after the sounds of *d*, *t*, *n* and *s*, for example: *due*, *dew*, *news*, *duke*, *suit*, *duty*, *suitable*, *Tuesday*, *new*, *knew*, *student*, *stupid*, *nude*, *numerous*, *studio*, *steward*, etc.

It should not be presumed, however, that whenever *ju* occurs in BE, *u* does in AE. It is not at all true. There are many words where in both AE and BE the diphthong *ju* is preserved, e. g.: *few*, *humor* (British: *humour*), *beauty*, *cue*, *music*, *pure*, *view*, *human*, etc.

Two more differences of a vocalic nature must be mentioned before consonants and semivowels are taken up.

In words like: *laboratory*, *hereditary*, *temporary*, *extraordinary*, *explanatory*, *military* in BE and only very rarely in AE the vowel of the penultimate (next to last) syllable is reduced to *ə* or most often entirely dropped. Thus the pronunciation of these words will most frequently be BE: [ləbərət(ə)rɪ], [hərədɪt(ə)rɪ] ... versus AE: [ləbrətərɪ] [hərədɪtərɪ], ... The reduction of vowels is closely connected with the problem of stress. Therefore this issue will be raised again when differences in stress are detailed.

**Nasal** quality seems to be the last very significant feature (pertaining to vowels) to be mentioned here. In the speech of many Americans (especially in the

South) nasalization of vowels and diphthongs can be discovered. Thus the vowels in: *man, ham, camp, ramp, any, sing, hang, long, ram, den, Ben, Sam*, get a slightly nasalized quality in AE. This change is most probably due to the neighboring context (a nasal sound) since vowels followed by nasal consonants are usually those which get nasalized.

## CONSONANTS

British and American English manifest very few essential differences in the consonantal system.

The stops: **p, t, k, b, d, g**, appear in both BE and AE in words like: *potato, try, lock, bark, ladder, beg* with substantially the same place of articulation and contextually determined degree of voicing.

The exception to these is **t** which in AE may have either the same value as in BE or may be voiced and thus become acoustically almost identical with the intervocalic flapped sound (one tap of the tongue against the alveolar ridge) of BE in such words like: *worry, hurry, very*. The voiced variety of **t** is commonly heard throughout the United States in the following context:

1. when in intervocalic position before an unstressed vowel, as in: *letter, butter, better, bitter, cutters, writing, get it, I got it*
2. when preceding a syllabic **l**, as in: *beetle, subtle, little, kettle, bottle*
3. when between **n** and an unstressed vowel, as in: *twenty, wanted, plenty, winter*. When following a stressed vowel plus **n** and preceding an unstressed vowel the **t** may be lost altogether: *twenty, wanted*
4. when between unaccented vowels, as in: *at another station; if it is easy*. In BE **t** is never voiced.



The **fricative** consonants are nine in number. They are essentially the same in the two varieties.

1. **f** — *factor, after, enough*
2. **v** — *voice, oven, love*
3. **θ** — *thick, anthropological, death*
4. **ð** — *this, other, smooth*
5. **s** — *sad, upside, press*
6. **z** — *zeal, position, boys*
7. **ʃ** — *sure, cushion, brush*
8. **ʒ** — *pleasure, rouge*
9. **h** — *hideous, ahead*

The affricates (combinations of a stop and a fricative) **tʃ** and **dʒ** appear in both BE and AE in: **chuck, crutch and judge and huge**, respectively.

The nasals **n, m, ŋ**, do not show any differences either. They occur in words like: **nationality, notion, pen, mock, coming, ram, going, bring**.

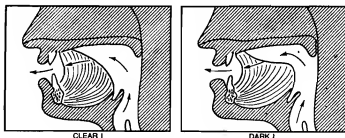


Fig. 3\*

The **lateral l** differs in BE and AE in the distribution of its two possible realizations — the so-called **clear l** and **dark l**. Fig. 3 illustrates the difference in articulation between the two sounds in question. Although evident to the trained linguist, the difference does not seem to be easily detected by the average speaker.

In BE **dark l** occurs:

1. in word final position after vowels as in: *Bill, dull, cool, rule, sell, bell, deal, seal, call*;
2. and after vowels before consonants as in: *help, cold, sold, rolled, bolt, milk, silk, self, shelves, kilt, film, sealed*, etc.
3. In all other cases **l** is clear.

In AE, however, this distinction seems to be gradually disappearing. The **dark** variety of **l**, **ɫ** has been gaining ground in the sound system of AE. Thus in words like: *lamp, luck, look, ladder, leak, leap, lend, lack, lump* BE will have a **clear l** whereas AE a **dark l**. It is chiefly speakers of the South Atlantic region who still preserve the **clear-dark l** distinction.

#### SEMIVOWELS

The two semivowels **j** and **w** manifest no differences. They appear in words like: *yes, yoke, water, whistle*, etc. In both BE and AE **w** and **hw** may be heard in the **wh**-words like: *what, when, where, whatever, why*, etc. It is estimated, however, that BE has **w** more often than AE.

Finally, in order to make our sound system survey complete, the frictionless continuant **r** (often approached as a semivowel) must be mentioned. This sound seemingly carries the most implication as to which variety of English is being used.

In words like: *father, mother, sir, blurr, dear, rear, sayer, bother, leather, care, lurk, dirt, sort, card, lord, bard, burden, court, lard, George, north*, i. e., either in word final position after vowels or before consonants **r** is pronounced, in the types we are considering, only in AE. However, in BE in words like: *brother, gather*,

*beer* **r** is pronounced when another vowel follows, e. g., *my brother and ...*

In BE the sound which is represented in writing by the letter **r** is essentially of three kinds:

1. a **non-syllabic** vowel (functions as a consonant and has a non-central situation in the syllable) initially as in: *reach, read, root, rack, run*
2. a **fricative** sound after some stops as in: *prize, prank, try, truth*, (voiceless), *dry, drank* (voiced)
3. a **flap** consonant when intervocalic as in: *very, bury, Jerry, Mary, sorry, marry*, or following **θ**, **ð**, e. g.: *three, with respect, through*. In fact, the **flap r** is gradually disappearing in BE, being replaced by the frictionless retroflexed **r**.

In AE point 1 mentioned for BE corresponds to the American sound with more or less the same value with, however, a definite retroflexion of the tip of the tongue toward the hard palate.

American speech has lost the **fricative r** (British 2.) except in a few isolated instances such as when immediately following the **t** and **d**, e. g., *try, dry*. This **fricative** sound, still widely used in BE, has been replaced by the retroflexed frictionless **r** which occurs initially as in the examples already cited.

In AE the **flap** intervocalic consonant (British 3.) is not used either. Instead, the retroflexed frictionless sound is consistently employed. The degree of retroflexion and what is partly determined by this — the duration of the sound — varies from dialect to dialect or even from speaker to speaker.

The final and preconsonantal sound spelled **r**, in the examples quoted at the beginning of this discussion takes a somewhat different form. Because of the retroflexion of the tongue that accompanies the produc-

tion of a vowel the phenomenon of the so-called *r*-coloring of vowels takes place. Such *r*-colored vowels usually occur in words like: *lord*, *curb*, *loser*, *lark*, *lurk*, etc.

The existence of *r*-colored vowels in American English is due to the different development of the English language as spoken in the British Isles and on the American continent. In Shakespeare's time final and preconsonantal vowels were also accompanied by the *r* sound. It was only in the early nineteenth century that the sound was dropped in the British variety.

Irrespective of what the status of the various realizations of the sound is, *r* constitutes one of the very easily detectable features that markedly contribute to the distinction of the two varieties of English.

#### IRREGULAR DIFFERENCES

There is a considerable number of words which differ in their phonetic shape and whose phonetic discrepancies can hardly be classified according to the various regularized differences listed above. The group of the most frequently used words will comprise the following items:

	AE	BE
asthma	<i>æzmə</i>	<i>æsmə</i>
advertisement	<i>ədʋɜ̃táɪzmənt</i>	<i>ədʋɜ̃tɪsmənt</i> <sup>7</sup>
blouse	<i>blaʋs</i>	<i>blaʋz</i> <sup>8</sup>
Berkeley (city)	<i>bɜ̃klɪ</i>	<i>bá:klɪ</i>
borough	<i>búroʋ</i>	<i>bá:rə</i>
clerk	<i>klɜ̃k</i>	<i>kla:k</i>
docile	<i>dəsəl</i>	<i>dəʋsəl</i>
derby	<i>dɜ̃bɪ</i>	<i>dá:bɪ</i>
either <sup>9</sup>	<i>íðɜ̃</i>	<i>áɪðə</i>
epoch	<i>épək</i>	<i>ípək</i>

leisure	liʒə	lɛʒə
lieutenant	luténənt	ləfténənt
neither <sup>10</sup>	niðʒ	náɪðə
process	prases	prəʊses
progress	pragres <sup>11</sup>	prəʊgres
suggest	səʒdʒést	sədʒést
shone ( <i>past of</i> <i>shine</i> )	ʃəʊn	ʃɔ:n
schedule	skédʒul	ʃédʒul
tomato	təmɛɪtəʊ	təmá:təʊ
vase	veɪs	vɑ:z
z	zi	zɛd

In this way some of the peculiarities of BE and AE have been indicated in the area of pronunciation. One fact seems to be worth keeping in mind: in many respects the sound system of AE particularly resembles that of the English language as spoken by the British people up to the eighteenth century. The retention of the final and preconsonantal *r* sound and the flat *æ* serve as very good examples.

Pronunciation is closely related to the patterns of stress and intonation. Therefore dissimilarities pertaining to these two aspects of speech will now be discussed in detail.

## II. Stress

As has already been mentioned, there are a number of words in BE (occasionally also in AE) that manifest an advanced reduction or complete loss of the penultimate vowel. This group includes words like: *hereditary*, *laboratory*, *adversary*, etc. That fact may result from a different placement of stress in some words (as in *laboratory* — BE *labóratory*, AE *láboratòry*) and an evident survival of earlier secondary stress in AE.

Weakly stressed vowels are often reduced to ə or entirely dropped. That brings us to the problem of a different distribution of stress in the two varieties of English, and at the same time, to the relationships that hold between this distribution and the qualitative and quantitative changes that the various vowels undergo when stressed differently.

Apart from that, another fact must be realized, namely, that in English (both BE and AE) stress is phonemic, i. e., placing the stress on a different syllable in a word may cause a change of meaning. This holds true in words like: *cónsole* (desklike frame containing the *keys, stops, pedals* and *other controls* of an organ) versus *consóle* (to *comfort* someone).

Thus a word when having the first syllable stressed may be a noun; however, when the stress falls on the second syllable the word is automatically shifted to the verb category.

Questions pertaining to stress in BE and AE may be quite often solved in terms of personal or regional preferences, although, generally speaking, stress variations can be easily handled, and there are but a few examples that might puzzle a person investigating the differences. This definitely results from the fact that the corpus containing words which exhibit stress discrepancies is relatively small.

Words which differ in stress in BE and AE and most significantly show the existence in AE of the primary and secondary stress with a non-reduced penultimate vowel are like the following:

	AE	BE
allegory	æləgɔːrɪ	æləg(ə)rɪ
arbitrary	ɑːbɪtrɪrɪ	ɑːbɪtr(ə)rɪ
blackberry	blækberɪ	blæk(ə)b(ə)rɪ



résource	resóurce
rómance	románce
tránslate	transláte

Group 2 includes words like:

AE	BE
arístocrat	áristocrat
berét	béret
café	cáfe
compléx ( <i>adjective</i> )	cómpléx
crochéť	cróchet
elóngate	élongate
frontíer	fróntier
haráss ( <i>verb</i> )	háarrass

The membership of some words in particular syntactic categories has been indicated, for example, *address* (see group 1.) since otherwise such words could be taken as either verbs or nouns; in the latter case the stress difference between BE and AE disappears. *Addréss* with the stress on the second syllable in both British and American English is a widely used verb form. Examples like: *berét* and *crochéť* show that in AE the stress of French borrowing is not subordinated to the patterns of English but is retained on the last syllable.

### III. Intonation

Intonation may be defined as: *a contour of melody consisting of different pitches and a terminal inflection*, (Bronstein; 1960). Variations (contours) of melody constitute one of the most relevant features for any overall description of natural languages.


The three main intonation patterns which are as-




sociated with particular types of sentences are: rising, falling and level. These terms may refer to both identification of terminal pitch levels between or on syllables and at the terminal points of an utterance.


In both BE and AE the rising intonation at the terminal point of an utterance is used for **yes-no** questions, i. e., questions requiring short answers starting in **yes** or **no**, e. g.:


Are you going? 

Is he going to do it? 


The falling intonation is used for:


1. orders, e.g., come with us , don't do it now 

2. statements, e.g., I am going home 


She is coming soon 

3. questions starting with *when, why, where, who, what,*

*how*, e.g., Why do you want to do it? 

How are you going to handle it? 

The level kind of melody can be detected as a kind of incomplete intonation pattern found, for example, in sentences involving the enumeration of a series of items e. g.:

John, Mary, George, Lucy and Stan came yes terday 

Naturally the level intonation cannot be applied to sentence terminals but only to parts of sentences followed by a very short pause. In these cases the distin-

guishable parts of sentences do not end in a falling or rising contour but tend to sustain the pitch level already acquired.

A detailed investigation of the various differences between BE and AE pertaining to intonation would involve too much theoretical consideration with separate references to BE and AE. Therefore it is only the following general statement that ought to be kept in mind: BE employs different intonation modifications with rises and falls within a sentence much more frequent than in AE. American intonation is generally more level, i. e., lacking the mentioned rises and falls. Examples:

AE: It's a beautiful country with many large lakes

BE: It's a beautiful country with many large lakes

AE: Because of the warm and sunny weather oranges grow very well here

BE: Because of the warm and sunny weather oranges grow very well here

AE: My hobby is collecting stamps

BE: My hobby is collecting stamps

AE: The hardest thing to learn is to be a good loser

BE: The hardest thing to learn is to be a good loser

Intonation differences can best be illustrated when a text is read by a native American and a native British speaker. Since this practical procedure seems to be most useful for our purposes a random selection of such texts is recommended. The reader should refer to the script which is appended to the manual.

It should be realized that the proper use of intonation variations, as opposed to stress, requires so much effort and practice on the part of the learner that in fact it constitutes the most difficult skill for the non-native speaker to acquire.

After the American colonies became independent there appeared a number of language reformers and revolutionaries who, among other things, suggested a variety of changes in the spelling system of the American language.

As early as 1768 Benjamin Franklin elaborated *A Scheme for a New Alphabet and Reformed Mode of Spelling* which in fact contained all of the traditional alphabetical symbols; only six were new. He proposed using them, however, in quite a different manner.

Following B. Franklin, there were other proposals which aimed to simplify the system to the greatest possible extent. The spelling which was advocated at that time, but never taken very seriously, included words like: *ritten* (for *written*), *waz* (for *was*), *wil* (for *will*), *helth* (for *health*), etc.

In his *American Spelling Book* Webster suggested dividing words into syllables hoping that this method would be the easiest and the best to indicate pronunciation.

In the course of time more and more spelling innovations could be noticed. It turned out, however, that spelling, although a matter subject only to convention, was not at all easy to reform. Therefore almost all of the extreme suggestions of spelling reform were not taken up. Although the idea was to make pronunciation coincide with spelling, i. e., to level the grap-

hemic-phonemic correspondences, the whole reform campaign yielded few satisfactory results.

The most significant spelling differences which can be detected in present-day American and British English can be classified under the following headings:

**1. American -or versus British -our**

Examples:

AE	BE
honor	honour
armored	armoured
favor	favour
color	colour
flavor	flavour
labor	labour
behavior	behaviour
savior	saviour
harbor	harbour
humor	humour
neighbor	neighbour
candor	candour
parlor	parlour
odor	odour

The deletion of **u** in words like those mentioned above is supposed to have been favored by Samuel Johnson<sup>12</sup> who based his proposal on etymology going back to Latin. In cases where there was no etymological reason for the **o** form he made his changes by analogy and also for the sake of both uniformity and simplicity. It was only in America, however, that the **-or** spelling became general.

**2. American -z versus British -s**

This divergence is conspicuous in primarily two word groups:

a) Many AE verbs ending in **-ize** correspond to BE verbs ending in **-ise**,

Examples:

AE	BE
emphasize	emphasise
organize	organise
analyze	analyse
idealize	idealise
criticize	criticise

b) Similarly, AE nouns ending in **-ization** correspond to BE nouns ending in **-isation**. This spelling difference coincides accidentally with the pronunciation divergence already mentioned. Both **-isation** and **-ization** are pronounced **-ɪzəlɪʒn** in AE and **-aɪzəlɪʒn** in BE.

Examples:

AE	BE
organization	organisation
characterization	characterisation
secularization	secularisation
generalization	generalisation

It must be noted that examples pertaining to points 2a and 2b in comparison with those of point 1. are typical instances of preferences. This especially refers to BE which very often in both cases 2a and 2b employs **-z** as well as **-s**. AE is much more consistent in this respect. **Z** in both **-ize** (**-ise**) and **-ization** (**-isation**) words is almost always used.

### 3. American **-er** versus British **-re**

Examples:

AE	BE
theater	theatre
center	centre

meter	metre
fiber	fibre
liter	litre
cider	cidre

4. American single consonant versus British double consonants before a suffix in unstressed syllables

Examples:

AE	BE
traveled	travelled
traveler	traveller
traveling	travelling
woolen	woollen
councilor	councillor
marvelous	marvellous
rivaled	rivalled
labeled	labelled
focused	focussed
dialed	dialled

In some cases, however, the reverse phenomenon can be noticed in stressed syllables, i. e., two consonants in AE versus a single consonant in BE, for example;

AE	BE
fulfill	fulfil
fulfillment	fulfilment
skillful	skilful

As can be seen it is mainly the lateral l sound that makes the difference.

5. American -se versus British -ce

## Examples:

AE	BE
defense	defence
license	licence
offense	offence
pretense	pretence
practise	practice <sup>1a</sup>

## 6. American -i versus British -y

### Examples:

AE	BE
tire	tyre
siphon	syphon

7. In AE the spelling of words of foreign origin is very often simplified, e. g.; *dialogue*, *catalogue*, *pedagogue*, *monologue* (usual in both AE and BE) are sometimes rendered in AE as *dialog*, *catalog*, *pedagog*, *monolog*. Also, AE: *gram* and *program* versus BE: *gramme* and *programme* serve as good examples of simplification.

In words of Greek and Latin origin other ways of simplification can be perceived. American -e is used where British has *oe* or *ae*, for example:

AE	BE
anemia	anemia
anesthesia	anaesthesia
diarrhea	diarrhoea
encyklopedia	encyclopaedia
medieval	medi(a)eval
paleontology	palaeontology



Also, **f** is occasionally used in AE where **ph** is in BE.

Examples:

AE	BE
sulfur	sulphur
sulfate	sulphate
sulfa	sulpha

The French **ou** is sometimes **u** in AE, e. g., AE: *mustache*, BE: *moustache*.

### 8. American **in** versus British **en**

Examples:

AE	BE
inquiry	enquiry
inclosure	enclosure

In fact in AE the spelling **in** and **en** in words like those mentioned here may be used interchangeably.

### 9. American **y** versus British **i**

Examples:

AE	BE
gypsy	gipsy
gayety	gaiety

Points 1 through 9 exemplify the relatively regular differences or in most cases (particularly points 8 and 9) preferences pertaining to British and American spelling.

At this point, it must be emphasized that the types of discrepancies enumerated in points 1 through 9 do not indicate that any word containing a cluster of letters classified in a given type exhibits exactly the

same spelling difference. For example, the word *contour* would very well fit the pattern described in point 1. However, in both BE and AE the *-our* spelling is retained (the sound represented is *uə* rather than *ɜ*), the form being *contour*. The word *contour* basically differs from the examples listed in point 1 in that it has the secondary stress falling on the second syllable. Therefore, it may be concluded that the *-or*, *-our* difference refers only to unstressed syllables. Other examples, however, (those listed in points 2 through 9) do not let us arrive at any generalizations.

In addition to the above-mentioned more or less regular differences, there are some words which do not fall within any of the groups already discussed. Some of these isolated differences are:

AE	BE
ax	axe
aluminum	aluminium <sup>14</sup>
cozy	cosy
curb ( <i>noun</i> )	kerb
check	cheque ( <i>the bank variety</i> )
draft	draught
hello	hallo, hello
jail	gaol, jail
jewelry	jewellery
judgment	judgement
pajamas	pyjamas
plow	plough
reflection	reflexion, reflection

Finally, it should be mentioned that some compound words are spelled either separately with a hyphen, separately without a hyphen or together, depending on the variety.

**Examples:**

**AE**

**breakdown**

**blowout**

**blowup**

**makeup**

**welldone**

**BE**

**break-down**

**blow-out**

**blow-up**

**make-up**

**well-done**

**VOCABULARY**

It must have been noticed that in the areas of pronunciation, stress, intonation and spelling the number of similarities between the two varieties of English definitely outweighs the number of discrepancies. Likewise in the area of vocabulary the most often used words are the same in the two varieties under consideration. It should be emphasized, however, that the differences pertaining to pronunciation, stress, intonation and spelling are much more stable, i. e., the language in the components mentioned is not affected by the various processes that affect the vocabulary and grammar of either variety.

The vast corpus of vocabulary differences between BE and AE, which is in part represented below, came about, among other reasons, as a natural result of the environmental differences that the two varieties of English were exposed to.

As has already been mentioned in the introduction, in order to name the unknown objects the colonists were forced either to borrow words from other languages (such as the Indian languages) or to coin their own words and expressions. These neologisms referred to the political, economic, cultural and religious life of the new society.

Until the nineteen-twenties the number of vocabulary differences had been increasing very rapidly. The year 1925 is often associated with a sudden turn which

initiated a conspicuous infiltration of Americanisms into BE. This fact can also be accounted for in terms of the natural results of the various extra-linguistic processes in both the United States and Great Britain.

Due to an extensive exchange of films and books as well as the spread of radio and television, a number of originally American words and expressions also began to be used in Britain. Having accepted a considerable number of the "new forms" the British people do not seem to realize that many lexical items they use in everyday conversation are of American origin.

Today the English vocabulary is developing in two ways in both nations. Literary and colloquial vocabulary seem to be gradually merging, i. e., there are more and more instances of Americanisms in Britain and of Britishisms in America. On the other hand, slang expressions show a definite and rapid split of forms.

Since a discussion of slang will not be undertaken in this presentation, the former of the two mentioned aspects of vocabulary differences will be pointed out.

When an Englishman is asked the question: *Do you use this word?* one of the possible answers he may give is: *Yes, we do, but it is definitely an Americanism.* An American in an analogous situation might answer: *Yes, we do but it is a Britishism.* These two possible reactions may help to conceive of the existence of different forms and, moreover, with the proper handling of the whole phenomenon.

The trouble is how to account for the status of a word in the English vocabulary, how to arrive at a right conclusion as to the occurrence of a word in either variety. Experience shows that it is only by interviewing a large number of native speakers, Americ-

ans and Englishmen, that a linguist can decide whether a word is either American or British. It is also quite difficult and often risky to state whether a word or expression is used exclusively or non-exclusively in either variety. A given item may be entirely unknown to one, ten or one hundred persons centered in one linguistic area; however, an inhabitant of a distant city associated with a different dialect may turn out to be quite familiar with it.

All this brings us to conclude that vocabulary differences between BE and AE have to be considered in large part in terms of individual preferences. It seems almost impossible to draw a sharp distinction between exclusively used words, i. e., words assigned only to one variety, and preference words, i. e., words which occur in both varieties but are preferably used only in one.

Despite the operation of the various processes that have been leading to a relative overlap in use of some of the vocabulary items which used to distinguish the two varieties of English, a considerable number of words still contrast in the two types of English. These words and expressions refer to a large variety of areas such as education, motorization, entertainment, politics, cooking, etc.

The selection of words and expressions presented below is limited to those items which are used in everyday and colloquial language. It should be realized that the list indicated here includes only a few randomly chosen professional terms. The real number of technical vocabulary dissimilarities is somewhat longer. Setting up a complete list of them would be a very difficult task and, in fact, it would not fall within the scope of this handbook.

Thus, in order to meet the needs of the reader a list

made up of significant words and expressions referring to everyday life seems to be the most appropriate.

## AE

absorbent cotton  
ad /advertisement/  
ailment, sickness, illness  
alumni-s/a/, University graduate  
ale, beer  
amusement park  
apartment  
ash-can, trash can, garbage can  
attorney /at law/  
baby buggy, baby carriage, buggy  
back of, in back of, behind  
/to/ back up /car/, reverse  
baggage, luggage  
baggage car  
bar, tavern, cocktail lounge  
bar keeper  
bartender  
bathrobe, robe, dressing gown  
beet  
bill<sup>15</sup>  
billboard  
billfold, wallet  
blank<sup>16</sup>, form

## BE

cotton wool  
advert, ad  
illness  
/University/ graduate  
bitter, beer, ale  
fun fair  
flat  
dust-bin  
solicitor, barrister  
pram  
behind  
reverse  
luggage  
luggage van  
public house /pub/  
publican, landlord  
barman, barmaid  
dressing gown  
beetroot  
/bank/note  
hoarding, billboard  
wallet, note case  
form

# AE

blinders /horse/  
 block of houses, row  
 of houses  
 bonds  
 bouncer  
 bowling  
 boxcar  
 broiled  
 buddy  
 bug  
 bulletin board  
  
 bung-starter, key tap-  
 per, tap  
 bus  
 business suit  
 cab, taxi  
 cab stand, taxi stand,  
 taxi rank  
 caboose /railroad/  
 cable, telegram, wire  
 can  
 /to/ can  
 candy  
 canteen  
 captain, sergeant,  
 police lieutenant  
 car /railway pas-  
 senger/  
 catnip  
 cereal  
 chain store, chain

# BE

blinkers -  
 block of flats, row of  
 houses  
 debentures  
 chucker out, bouncer  
 ninepins, bowling  
 goods van  
 grilled<sup>17</sup>  
 chap, mate  
 insect, beetle  
 notice board, bulletin  
 board  
 beer-mallet  
  
 coach<sup>18</sup>  
 lounge suit<sup>19</sup>  
 taxi  
 taxi stand, taxi rank,  
 cab rank  
 brake van  
 telegram, wire  
 tin, can  
 /to/ tin, /to/ can  
 sweets  
 waterbottle, canteen  
 inspector  
  
 coach, carriage  
  
 catmint, catnip  
 porridge, cereal<sup>20</sup>  
 multiple store, chain  
 store



# AE

check /cloakroom/  
check /restaurant/  
/to/ check in  
/to/ check out /hotel/  
checkers /game/  
checkroom

chicken yard  
cigar store, tobacco  
store

city hall, town hall  
city-ordinance  
clean-up campaign

clergyman, minister,  
preacher

clerk

clipping /newspaper/  
closed season /hunting/

closet, cupboard

clothes pin

club, black-jack  
/policeman's/

coed

collar button

common stock

commuter

conductor /railroad/

cone /ice cream/

cook-book

cook, cracker

corn<sup>22</sup>

corporation

# BE

tag

bill

/to/ book in

/to/ leave

draughts

left-luggage office,

left-luggage room

chicken run

tobacconist's shop

town hall, guild hall

by-law

cleansing campaign,

clean-up campaign

rector, vicar, curate,

parson, clergyman

shop assistant<sup>21</sup>

cutting, clipping

close season

cupboard

clothes peg

truncheon

female student

collar stud, back stud

ordinary shares

season ticket holder

guard

cornet, cone

cookery-book

biscuit<sup>22</sup>

maize

company

# AE

crankcase  
 crazy-bone, funny bone  
 creamery, dairy  
 crystal /watch/  
 dead end  
 deck of cards  
 delegation  
 deliveryman /milk,  
 bread/  
 dentures, false teeth  
 derby, derby hat  
 desk clerk, room-clerk,  
 clerk  
 detour  
  
 diaper  
 dining car, diner  
  
 dishpan  
 district attorney, state's  
 attorney, DA  
 distributor /merchan-  
 dise/  
 domestic mail, local  
 mail<sup>24</sup>  
 downtown  
 druggist  
 dry-goods store  
 dumb-waiter  
 dumb, stupid, silly  
 editorial  
  
 electric heater

# BE

sump, crankcase  
 funny bone  
 dairy  
 watch glass  
 cul de sac  
 pack of cards  
 deputation, delegation  
 roundsman, deliveryman  
  
 false teeth  
 bowler  
 reception clerk  
  
 road diversion, traffic  
 diversion, detour  
 nappy  
 restaurant carriage,  
 dining carriage  
 washing-up bowl, dishpan  
 public prosecutor  
  
 stockist, distributor  
  
 inland mail  
  
 centre of the city  
 chemist  
 draper's shop  
 service lift  
 stupid, silly  
 leading article, leader,  
 editorial  
 electric fire

# AE

elevator  
 engineer /railroad/  
 eraser  
 excelsior  
 express company  
 extension cord  
 fall /season/<sup>26</sup>  
 /to/ fall sick, /to/  
     get sick  
 faucet, spigot, spicket,  
     tap  
 fender /automobile/  
 ferryboat operator  
 /to/ figure out  
 /to/ fill out  
 filling station, gas  
     station  
 fire alarm box  
 fire-bug  
 fire department  
 first floor<sup>27</sup>  
 first name, given name  
 fish-dealer, fish man  
 fix  
 flashlight  
 floorwalker  
 flophouse  
 fraternal order  
 freight car  
  
 French fries, French  
     fried potatoes<sup>28</sup>  
 freshman

# BE

lift  
 engine-driver  
 Indian rubber, eraser  
 wood wool  
 carrier  
 flex, extension wire  
 autumn  
 /to/ fall ill  
  
 tap  
  
 wing, mudguard  
 ferryman  
 /to/ arrive at a solution<sup>29</sup>  
 /to/ fill in  
 petrol pump, garage,  
     filling station  
 fire alarm  
 fire-raiser  
 fire brigade  
 ground floor  
 Christian name  
 fishmonger  
 repair<sup>30</sup>  
 torch  
 shopwalker  
 doss house  
 friendly society  
 goods waggon, goods  
     van  
 chips  
  
 first year student

## AE

front paws  
 game  
 garbage man  
 gas, gasoline  
 gear shift  
 general delivery /post  
   office/  
 generator /automobile/  
 gingersnap  
 glasses, eyeglasses  
 glue  
 government bonds  
 grab bag  
 grade /noun, as of  
   a road/  
 grade/ /school/  
 grade crossing  
   /railroad/  
 grocery, grocery store,  
   supermarket  
 ground wire /radio/  
 grounded  
 /to/ guess, figure  
 hall, hallway /in a  
   building/  
 hand-me-downs  
 hard cider  
 hard liquor, liquor  
 highball<sup>22</sup>  
  
 highway patrolmen  
 high school, secondary  
   school

## BE

fore paws  
 match, game  
 dustman  
 petrol  
 gear lever  
 poste restante  
  
 dynamo<sup>20</sup>  
 gingernut  
 spectacles, glasses  
 gum, glue  
 consols, stocks, funds  
 lucky dip  
 gradient  
  
 form, standard, class  
 level crossing  
  
 grocer's shop, grocer's,  
   supermarket  
 earth wire  
 earthed  
 /to/ think<sup>21</sup>  
 passage<sup>22</sup>  
  
 reach-me-downs  
 rough cider, cider  
 spirits  
 whisky and soda, whisky  
   and ginger ale  
 mobile police  
 secondary school

# AE

hogpen, pig pen  
 hog raiser  
 holdup man, stickup  
     man, hijacker  
 hood /automobile/  
 hunting  
 ice cream  
 identification tag, ID  
 Incorporated /Inc./  
 information, informat-  
     ion bureau  
 installment plan,  
     credit plan  
  
 insurance /life/  
 insurance-adjuster,  
     claims adjuster  
 intermission  
 janitor, porter  
  
 kerosene  
 labor scab, scab  
 ladybug  
 lawyer, attorney /at  
     law/  
 life-boat, life-raft  
 life preserver  
 line /of people/  
     /to/ line up  
     /to/ loan, /to/ lend  
     /to/ locate, /to/ find  
 low gear, low, first

# BE

pig sty  
 pig breeder  
 raider, holdup man,  
     hijacker<sup>24</sup>  
 bonnet  
 shooting<sup>25</sup>, hunting  
 ice cream, ice  
 identity disk  
 Limited /Ltd./  
 enquiry office, informat-  
     ion, information bureau  
 hire purchase system,  
     hire system, installment  
     plan, never-never  
 assurance, insurance  
 fire assessor, assessor  
  
 interval, intermission  
 caretaker<sup>26</sup>, porter,  
     janitor  
 paraffin  
 blackleg, scab  
 ladybird  
 solicitor, barrister,  
     lawyer  
 ship's boat, life-boat  
 life belt  
 queue  
     /to/ queue up  
     /to/ lend  
     /to/ find  
 first gear, bottom gear,  
     low gear

# AE

# BE

lumber	timber <sup>37</sup>
lunch counter, snack bar	snack bar
mail, post	post
mail-box	letter-box
mail car	postal van
mailman, postman	postman
master of ceremonies, MC	compère, master of cere- monies
molasses	treacle
monkey wrench	adjustable spanner, monkey wrench
movies, movie theater, movie house, cinema	cinema, pictures, films
moving /changing residences/	moving house, moving
muffler /automobile/	silencer
navy yard	dock-yard, naval yard
near-sighted	short-sighted
newsstand	kiosk, newsstand
nightstick	truncheon
oarlock	rowlock
oatmeal /boiled/	porridge
office /doctor's or dentist's/	surgery
office /lawyer's/	chambers, office
oil pan /automobile/ /to/ O kay, approve	sump
one-way ticket	approve
	single ticket, one-way ticket
operating cost	running expense, ope- rating cost
orchestra seats /theater/	stalls
pacifier	dummy

# AE

packaged  
 pantry  
 parking lot  
 patrolman /police/  
 pay-roll  
 pebbly beach  
 penitentiary, pen<sup>38</sup>,  
     prison  
 penpoint  
 pension plan  
 period /punctuation/  
 phonograph, record  
     player  
 pitcher  
 policeman, cop  
  
 poolroom, poolhall,  
     billiard  
 potato chip  
 pot pie  
 preferred stock  
 principal<sup>40</sup> /school/  
 /to/ pry /to/ raise,  
     /to/ seperate  
 public toilet, restroom  
 publisher /newspaper/  
 pushover  
 quotation marks  
  
 race track  
 radio  
 railroad  
 railroad man /laborer/

# BE

packed  
 larder, pantry  
 car park  
 constable  
 wage-sheet, wage-list  
 shingle, pebbly beach  
 prison  
  
 nib  
 retirement scheme  
 full stop  
 record player  
  
 jug<sup>39</sup>  
 bobby, constable, poli-  
     ceman, cop  
 billiard saloon, poolroom  
  
 crisp  
 meat pie  
 preference shares  
 headmaster  
 /to/ prise  
  
 public convenience  
 proprietor, publisher  
 walk-over  
 inverted commas, quo-  
     tation marks  
 race course, race track  
 radio, wireless  
 railway<sup>41</sup>  
 navvy

## AE

railroad station, depot  
 raise /in pay/  
 rare /of meat/  
 real estate agent,  
     realtor, real estate  
     man  
 recess /school/  
 reform school  
 restroom, ladies' room,  
     men's room, toilet,  
     lavatory  
 Rhine wine  
 roadster  
 rock garden  
 roomer, tenant, lodger  
 rooster  
 rough going  
 roundhouse /railroad/  
 round-trip ticket  
 rumble seat  
 run /in a stocking/  
 salesman, clerk  
 Say /for attracting  
     attention/  
 schedule  
 scratch pad  
 secretary of state  
 section /of a city/  
 sedan /automobile/  
 semester, quarter,  
     trimester, term  
 senior

## BE

railway station  
 rise  
 underdone, rare  
 estate agent  
  
 break  
 borstal  
 lavatory, WC, toilet  
  
 Hock, Rhine wine  
 two seater  
 rockery  
 lodger, tenant  
 cock  
 heavy going  
 running shed, roundhouse  
 return ticket  
 dickey  
 ladder  
 shop assistant  
 I Say  
  
 time-table  
 scribbling block  
 foreign secretary  
 district  
 saloon car, saloon  
 term  
  
 fourth year student,  
     finalist



# AE

senior prom  
 shipment  
 shoe repairman's, shoe  
   maker's  
 shoe-shine  
 shoe strings, shoe laces  
 shoulder /of road/  
 sidewalk, pavement  
 slingshot  
 sophomore  
 spark plug  
 special delivery  
 super highway, turn-  
   pike, interstate road  
 spool /of thread/  
 sporting goods, sport  
   goods  
 squash  
 stairway  
 stockholder, sharehol-  
   der  
 straight /of a drink/  
 straw hat  
 street-cleaner  
 streetcar, trolley  
 string bean, green bean  
 stubs, check slips  
 subway<sup>44</sup>  
 surplus /corporation/  
 suspenders  
 swimsuit, bathing suit  
 taffy

# BE

graduation ball  
 consignment, shipment  
 shoe mender's  
 boot-polish  
 shoe laces  
 verge, shoulder  
 pavement, foot-path  
 catapult  
 second year student  
 sparking plug  
 express delivery  
 motor way  
 reel  
 sports goods, sports  
   requisites  
 vegetable marrow  
 staircase  
 shareholder  
 neat<sup>42</sup>, straight  
 boater<sup>43</sup>  
 road-sweeper  
 tram, tramcar  
 French bean  
 counterfails, stubs  
 underground, tube  
 reserve  
 braces  
 swimming costume, bat-  
   hing suit  
 toffee

# AE

teetotaler  
 telegrapher  
 telephone booth  
 thumbtack  
 ticket agent /railroad/  
  
 ticket office /railroad/  
 tidbits  
 tie /railroad/  
 tie-up /traffic/  
 top /automobile/  
 touchdown /football/  
 track /railroad/  
 traffic division, traffic  
   check  
 transport, carrier  
   /army ship/  
 trillion  
 truck  
 truck line, truck route  
 trunk /automobile/  
 tube /radio/  
 turn signals  
   /automobile/  
 turnips, yellow turnips  
 turtleneck /sweater/  
 underground pass,  
   underground passage  
 undershirt  
 union station  
 vacation, holidays  
 vacationer, tourist

# BE

abstainer, teetotaler  
 telegraphist  
 call box, telephone booth  
 drawing pin  
 booking-clerk, ticket  
   clerk  
 booking office, ticket office  
 titbits  
 sleeper  
 hold-up  
 hood<sup>45</sup>  
 try, touchdown  
 line, platform  
 on point duty  
  
 troopship, trooper  
  
 billion<sup>46</sup>  
 lorry  
 road hauler  
 boot  
 wireless valve  
 traffic indicators  
  
 swedes  
 poloneck  
 subway  
  
 vest, singlet  
 joint station  
 holidays  
 holiday maker, tourist,  
   tripper

## AE

## BE

vest<sup>47</sup>

/to/ vomit, /to/

throw up

warden /of a prison/

wash day

wash rag, wash cloth

water heater

weather bureau

windshield

witness stand

waistcoat

/to/ be sick<sup>48</sup>

governor

washing day

face flannel

geyser

meteorological office

windscreen

witness box

In the large selection of words listed above there are some pertaining to education. Apart from those mentioned in the list there are other terms which do not show a one to one correspondence. For example, AE: *graduate assistant, instructor, assistant professor, associate professor* nad *professor* are rendered in BE as *lecturer, reader* and *professor*.

Words and expressions like: *veteran, public school, homely* and *pavement* form a different type of dissimilarities. These terms are used in both varieties, however, they mean entirely different things (with the exception of *pavement* which in AE may occasionally mean the same that in BE).

For an American a *veteran* is any ex-soldier; for an Englishman — a soldier of long service. *Public school* in Britain is an exclusive and expensive school with almost medieval tradition as far as running the school is concerned. *Public school* in America is an ordinary state school open to everyone. *Homely* in BE may mean *nice* and *pleasant*, in AE — *ugly*. *Pavement* in Britain is what most Americans refer to as the *sidewalk*, for many Americans *pavement* is the surface of a road.

Realizing differences of this sort is essential since misusing words like *pavement* or *homely* may bring about considerable confusion if not insult or indignation.

As has been mentioned before, a detailed presentation of professional terminology will not be given here since it would be of interest only to a very limited audience and the manual would thus extend its scope showing differences which, practically speaking, do not play an important role in everyday conversation. However, in order to illustrate these discrepancies some random examples from music may be quoted.

AE	BE
double whole note	breve
a whole note	semibreve
a half note	minim
a quarter note	crotchet
an eighth note	quaver
a sixteenth note	semi-quaver

Many of the vocabulary differences discussed in this chapter have been quoted from Mencken who was one of the first reporters to give a systematic and meticulous treatment to AE with essential references to British-American differences. However, quite a number of dissimilarities mentioned by H. L. Mencken in his famous *The American Language* are no longer valid, for reasons that have already been indicated. Yet, it should be noted that the vocabulary changes occurring at present tend to be limited to one-way change only.

As can be deduced from the list provided above, BE quite often has two or three forms whereas AE only one.

## Examples:

AE	BE
newsstand	kiosk, newsstand
catnip	catmint, catnip
rare	underdone, rare
clipping	cutting, clipping

Only the first of the two British terms current nowadays was recorded by H. L. Mencken as current at that time<sup>49</sup>. This would indicate that gradually more and more Americanisms are making their way into BE.

Typical examples are *store* and *movies*, until very recently not used in Britain at all. Although still called Americanisms, these two words are getting more and more popular in Great Britain, and, in fact, can hardly be assigned to either variety.

All in all, vocabulary discrepancies between BE and AE are less numerous, but those that remain, still contribute to the differences between the two varieties of the language.

**PHRASEOLOGY**

Every language is characterized by a large number of idiomatic phrases or expressions which are composed of at least two words that combine to yield a meaning different from that of the individual words when used in their normal denotative meanings. These figurative or metaphoric expressions are an inherent part of language. Moreover, they reflect in a great many instances the culture in which the language operates. In terms of syntax, phrases of this kind seem to disobey at least some of the rules that generate grammatical sentences or their components. The words often combine in an unpredictable way, and in such cases literal translations are impossible.

Knowing all or almost all of the figurative expressions of a foreign language is very difficult, if not impossible, because idioms rapidly become old-fashioned or simply obsolete, and new expressions are coined instead. These, in turn, either take on a more permanent place in the speaker's vocabulary or in course of time disappear. In spite of this a knowledge of those phrases which are used most often is undoubtedly indispensable for easy communication.

Phraseological differences between BE and AE include a number of expressions pertaining to various areas of life. Also, each of the two varieties contains many phrases that do not seem to have phraseological equivalent in the other variety.

As has already been mentioned, a complete list of expressions seems hardly plausible. Therefore, in this handbook a random choice of current phrases is suggested. For simplification purposes the few similes and sayings present in the following lists, were not provided separately.

The idioms with appended explanations are arranged in alphabetical order. Lists of expressions with possibly no corresponding phraseological equivalent, used almost exclusively in either of the two varieties, are provided separately.

a) Expressions with corresponding phraseological equivalents in the other variety:

AE	BE	M
1. /to/ be ticked off	/to/ be cheesed off	to be fed up
2. /to/ break into line	/to/ jump the queue	to get into the middle of a line
3. /to/ fall between the cracks	/to/ fall between the stools	to get stuck somewhere
4. /to/ get a pink slip	/to/ get one's cards	to be laid off, dismissed
5. /to/ get up on the wrong side	/to/ get out of bed the wrong side	to be in a bad mood
6. /the/ gift of gab	/the/ gift of the gab	the ability to chat with anyone
7. /I don't/ give a hoot	/I don't/ care a hoot, ... give a hoot	I don't care at all

8. green thumb	green fingers	an unusual ability to make plants grow
9. hard as a rock	hard as stone, hard as nails	very hard
10. /to/ have a shot of vodka	/to/ have a spot of vodka	to have a lit- tle of vodka, a small glass of vodka
11. /to/ have enough to spare	/to/ have eno- ugh and to spare	to have eve- rything
12. /to/ hem and haw	/to/ hum and haw	to be unde- cided
13. /to/ hop to it	/to/ jump to it	to hurry up, to start doing <i>sth.</i>
14. if worse comes to worse	if the worst comes to the worst	in the worst case
15. in high gear	in top gear	at top speed
16. /they/ keep to themsel- ves	/they/ keep themselves to themsel- ves	they do not get involved in other people's affairs
17. /to/ laugh on/out of the other side of one's mouth	/to/ laugh ... face	to change from joy or triumph to sorrow or regret
18. /to/ let well enough alone	/to/ let well alone	to leave things as they are



19. /the/ life of the party	/the/ life and soul of the party	the most interesting person at a party
20. /to/ look at somebody through rose-colored glasses	/to/ look ..... rose-tinted spectacles	to be opti- mistic, to notice only good qua- lities
21. /to/ make a long story short	/to/ cut the long story short	to say sth briefly
22. /to/ make oneself clear	/to/ make oneself plain, make one- self clear	to present the matter in a clear way
23. more power to you	more power to your elbow	congratuations /said to one who has accomplished sth over diffi- cult odds/ or best wishes /said in antici- pation of such an effort
24. on the beam	on the ball	acting properly and effec- tively
25. /to/ play hookey	/to/ play truant	to stay away from school without good reason
26. puppy love	calf love	love of very young people

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 27. /you are/<br>putting me<br>on  | /you are/<br>having me<br>on  | you are spe-<br>aking insin-<br>cerely with<br>the aim of<br>making a<br>fool of or<br>making fun<br>of me                                  |
| 28. /to/ put the<br>screw/s/ to<br>somebody                                  | /to/ put the<br>screw on<br>somebody                                      | to put pres-<br>sure on<br>somebody so<br>that he has<br>to act   |
| 29. /they/ shove<br>their<br>opinions<br>down their<br>opponents'<br>throats | /they/ thrust<br>their<br>opinions<br>down their<br>opponents'<br>throats | they made<br>their op-<br>ponents act<br>the way<br>they wish<br>to throw<br>stones into<br>water so<br>that they<br>skip on the<br>surface |
| 30. /to/ skip<br>stones  | /to/ play ducks<br>and drakes   | to beat some-<br>body very<br>hard  |
| 31. /to/ slap...<br>beat some-<br>body silly                                 | /to/ beat some-<br>body hollow  | very sure   |
| 32. sure as you<br>are born  | as sure as eggs<br>is eggs  | to control<br>feelings  |
| 33. /to/ take<br>oneself<br>in hand,<br>get oneself<br>together              | /to/ have one-<br>self in hand  | to cause dif-   |
| 34. /to/ throw   | /to/ throw a  |   |

a monkey wrench into ...	spanner into ...	ficulties, usually through spite
35. wee hours of the morning	small hours of the morning	early hours of the morning
36. working devil	devil of work	a very hard- working person

b) Expressions which are not at all, or very rarely, used in AE:

BE	M
1. all his geese are swans	he exaggerates
2. /to/ ask for one's cards	to ask for permission to leave a job
3. /to/ be a cheeky devil	to be a very impudent person
4. /to/ be mean with money	to be stingy
5. /we/ cannot run to it	we cannot afford it
6. /to/ carry the can	to take responsibilities for others
7. /to/ come to a sticky end	to end up badly
8. /to/ cut one's coat according to one's cloth	to suit one's expenditure to one's income
9. Dutch courage	courage caused by alcohol
10. /to/ get money for jam	to get money for nothing

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 11. /to/ get money for<br>old rope                      | to get money for nothing  |
| 12. /to/ get the push                                   | to be fired from work   |
| 13. /to/ give full marks                                | to express full apprecia-<br>tion   |
| 14. /to/ give someone<br>the lie                        | to tell a lie   |
| 15. /to/ have one over<br>the eight                     | to be a little tipsy  |
| 16. /to/ have a read                                    | to read a little  |
| 17. /to/ have a laze                                    | to be idle for some time  |
| 18. /to/ have a lie<br>down                             | to lie down for a moment  |
| 19. higgledy-piggledy                                   | very fast and carelessly  |
| 20. in for a penny,<br>in for a pound                   | be consequent   |
| 21. least said, soonest<br>mended                       | the less you say the<br>better  |
| 22. milk will go off                                    | milk will become sour   |
| 23. neck or nothing                                     | one way or another  |
| 24. /to/ never have<br>a look-in                        | to never have hope for<br>success   |
| 25. pigs might fly                                      | it is absolutely impossible   |
| 26. /as/ plain as a pike<br>staff                       | very clear  |
| 27. /to/ put the wind<br>up someone                     | to frighten someone   |
| 28. /to/ set one's teeth                                | not to speak for a mo-<br>ment  |
| 29. /to/ send someone<br>away with a flea in<br>his ear | to teach someone a les-<br>son, to reprimand<br>someone                             |
| 30. /the/ thin end of<br>the wedge                      | introducing <i>sth</i> new<br>/seemingly trivial/<br>that will grow into <i>sth</i> |

important and possibly  
unpleasant

31. third time lucky      try for the third time

c) Expressions which are not, or very rarely, used in BE:

AE

M

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. according to Hoyle              | properly, according to the rules                |
| 2. /to/ be a grind                 | to be a hard-working overly serious student     |
| 3. /to/ beat one's brains out      | to think hard, usually without success          |
| 4. /to/ beat the bushes            | to search diligently in unlikely places         |
| 5. /to/ be in Dutch with someone   | to arouse someone's anger or resentment         |
| 6. /to/ be from Missouri           | to be always skeptical                          |
| 7. behing the eight-ball           | in trouble                                      |
| 8. /to/ chew the fat               | to gossip                                       |
| 9. crazy like a fox                | not crazy at all, sly                           |
| 10. /to/ die on the vine           | to act or live uselessly, without being noticed |
| 11. /to/ do a land-office business | to have an unusually large number of customers  |
| 12. /to/ do <i>sth</i> up brown    | to perform an act thoroughly                    |
| 13. /to/ drop the ball             | to make a stupid mistake                        |
| 14. drug on/in the market          | a commodity that is in oversupply               |
| 15. /to/ feel like two cents       | to feel very bad                                |
| 16. /to/ feel one's oats           | to act with unaccustomed boldness               |

- |                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 17. /to/ go to bat for someone      | to assist, support someone  |
| 18. /not to/ have a kick coming     | to have no reason to complain   |
| 19. /to/ have a lot on the ball     | to be very capable  |
| 20. /to/ have pull with             | to have personal influence on   |
| 21. /to/ high hat someone           | to be snobish, naughty toward someone                                     |
| 22. high sign                       | signal, often given stealthily or with gestures                           |
| 23. /to/ hit the deck               | to get out of bed   |
| 24. /to/ hit the high spots         | to do a job superficially, touch on only the outstanding places or points |
| 25. Johnny-come-lately              | newcomer  |
| 26. Johnny-on-the-spot              | a person who is prompt or present when help is needed.                    |
| 27. /to/ lay an egg                 | to fail   |
| 28. /to/ live high off the hog      | to live in luxury   |
| 29. loaded for bear                 | prepared to make a very aggressive attack                                 |
| 30. nip and tuck                    | very close /in contest/   |
| 31. on one's own hook               | without the assistance of others  |
| 32. on the fritz                    | out of order  |
| 33. /to/ pinch hit                  | to act in place of  |
| 34. /to/ put a bug in someone's ear | to give someone a hint  |
| 35. /to/ put on the dog             | to pretend to a higher social status than one really has                  |

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 36. /to/ rest on one's<br>oars                      | to pause in the midst of<br>effort                            |
| 37. right off the bat                               | immediately   |
| 38. /to/ run off at the<br>mouth                    | to talk pointlessly and at<br>length                          |
| 39. /to/ say uncle                                  | to admit defeat   |
| 40. /to/ shoot one's wad                            | to spend all one's money                                      |
| 41. /to/ shoot the<br>breeze, to shoot<br>the bull  | to chat, talk informally                                      |
| 42. /to/ shoot the<br>works                         | to employ all one's<br>means, usually in a<br>gambling spirit |
| 43. /not to/ sit right                              | not to be acceptable  |
| 44. /to/ snow someone                               | to bluff  |
| 45. /to/ take a flier                               | to gamble, especially on<br>the stock market                  |
| 46. /to/ take someone<br>to the cleaners            | to defeat someone badly                                       |
| 47. /to/ talk some-<br>one's leg /ear,<br>head/ off | to talk boringly and at<br>length                             |

A careful reader will notice that in a great many instances two equivalent American and British expressions differ only by one single word, i. e., a word is either substituted by another one or omitted.

Differences like:

AE	BE
gift of gab	gift of the gab
have enough to spare	have enough and to spare
in high gear	in top gear

serve as good examples. Instances like these are numerous and, it should be noted that they definitely outweigh the number of expressions whose form in one variety of English does not resemble that of the other at all.

Sometimes the choice of a preposition is different, e. g.,

AE: put the screw/s/ to somebody;	BE: put the screw on somebody .
--------------------------------------	------------------------------------

Most differences, however, reside in the different selection of verbs and nouns.

Slang and obscene phrases<sup>80</sup> show more discrepancies but no presentation of these will be attempted in this handbook.

Lists **b)** and **c)** include expressions which are used almost exclusively in BE and AE, respectively. Sections **b)** and **c)** differ from section **a)** in this that no approximate phraseological equivalents can be found for expressions listed in **b)** and **c)** This fact indicates that a comparison of phraseology of the two varieties cannot always be made in terms of one-to-one correspondence.

Lists **a)**, **b)**, and **c)** reflect the phraseological differences as pertaining rather to the speech of the young generation. For this reason the older speakers of the language may question a number of entries included in any of the three.

Before the final shape of lists **a)**, **b)**, and **c)** was arrived at all of the phrases (whose number was originally more extensive) had been read by many native speakers of both BE and AE. Opinions were split on a considerable number of items. Lists **a)**, **b)**, and **c)** in their final forms include only those expressions which were not objected to by any of the informants consulted.



Although the purpose of listing the differing expressions was not to supply the reader with a corpus of phrases to memorize, the reader might like to so. Therefore some guidance in the usage of these phrases seems necessary.

Expressions listed in sections a), b), and c) are presented rather as a glossary to be consulted as needed for aid in differentiating between the two varieties of English, not as a prescriptive collection of idioms for enlarging one's knowledge of English. In order to be able to use these phrases appropriately one has to be very well acquainted with the various levels of formality and informality that particular expressions are associated with. Otherwise a disastrous situation may be created. It is very easy for a learner to misuse a phrase, frequently causing an unpleasant misunderstanding or outright indignation or insult. The learner should start using a phrase after he has heard it several times and is sure he will not make himself ridiculous coming up with it in the wrong place.

This remark is rather of a more general nature and concerns learning idiomatic expressions in general. Nevertheless, it is hoped that a word of caution will prove useful.

## Chapter V

### GRAMMAR

When the student consults any available reference material concerning the differences between BE and AE one fact becomes obvious: grammar has been neglected in almost all studies undertaken so far. It has usually been pronunciation and lexical discrepancies that have been pointed out and analyzed thoroughly, and the investigation of syntactic differences has been limited to the most frequent cases and easily detectable occurrences.

There are three main reasons for this:

1. It is comparatively easy to detect pronunciation deviations. Lexicon involves listening to or subconscious learning of individual words.
2. Pronunciation and vocabulary differences, as opposed to grammar, are much greater in number.
3. Grammatical differences serve as the best example for the phenomenon of linguistic preference mentioned before<sup>51</sup>.

The perception and learning of grammatical divergencies may involve more advanced linguistic speculation and, definitely, can be thought of as a more cognitive process. Very often, when structures used in one variety of English differ from their counterparts in another variety only by a single feature, the majority of differences pass unnoticed (particularly when natives who are also non-linguists speak) and it is only the trained linguist who, with ease, gains insight into their syntactic arrangement.

The difficulty for presenting a comparison of American and British grammar is created primarily by two factors:

1. Many occurrences which are considered typical in AE can also be encountered in some dialects of BE and used with varying frequency.
2. Differences in the written language do not overlap those that show up in the spoken language.

The number of instances pertaining to the written language is in fact very small.

Once one decides to stick to the principle of priority of the spoken language this very medium of language automatically becomes the area of investigation. Also, as was indicated at the beginning of the present volume, our considerations do not extend beyond the limits of the previously defined Standard British and Standard American. Thus the comparison of grammar presented below will be rendered with the above-mentioned limitations.

## Verbs

### 1. *will, would, shall, should*

The distribution of these four auxiliaries in BE and AE is not delineated in terms of exclusive usage at all. Also in this case (especially in BE) only preference for one or other item is recorded.

In AE *will* and *would* have long been used instead of *shall* and *should* to express simple futurity as well as volition in the first person singular and plural. In AE *will* and *would* are used not only in affirmative sentences but also in both interrogative and negative ones.

### Examples

AE: *I **will** do it if only I can;*

BE: *I **shall** do it if only I can;*

AE: ***Will** I see you tomorrow?*

BE: ***Shall** I see you tomorrow? or **Will** I see you tomorrow?*

It is not incorrect to use **shall** and **should** in AE; however, one rarely hears these forms<sup>55</sup> used by native Americans.

On the other hand, British speakers, although still preserving **shall** and **should**, also tend to be gradually replacing these by **will** and **would**. This holds true particularly in the case of **would** which in comparison with **will** is employed much more frequently. Thus the difference pertaining to the past use becomes actually blurred.

Consequent use of **will** and **would** in AE instead of **shall** and **should** in BE concerns various grammatical constructions like Future Sentences, Reported Speech structures, rhetorical questions, subjunctive phrases, etc. However, in structures like: *You **should** do it* or when **shall** expresses purpose or authority, both **shall** and **should** are also used in AE.

## 2. **do**

The auxiliary verb **to do** is widely used for forming questions and negative sentences like ***Do** you know him?* and *He **doesn't** know.* The particular forms of the verb differ according to the tense and sentence type employed.

Discrepancies between BE and AE are limited only to one verb **to have** with respect to which **do** is applied on varying principles. In BE the use of **do** is, as a rule, restricted to habitual actions, for example: *What time **do** you **have** breakfast every morning?*

Occasionally, however, it may be used in other constructions, e. g., substituting *to obtain* or *to receive* as in: **Did** he **have** an opportunity to come here?, to be obliged as in: **Do** I **have** to do that?. **Do** is very seldom used in BE with **to have** in the sense of *possess*. Inversion and *not* are used instead. For example: **Have** you (got) enough money?; I **haven't** (got) a television set.

Note the difference (in BE) between **Do** you always **have** two eggs for breakfast? (habitually) and **Have** you (got) a bag? (possession).

This distribution applies to most uses of **to have** in the present tense. **Did** — forms are possible, beside **had** (in the past) in all senses of **to have** including *to possess*.

In AE **do** is used in all senses of **to have**. An American will therefore, say: **Do** you **have** any brothers or sisters? and **We don't have** a garden. An Englishman, on the other hand, would say: **Have** you any brothers or sisters? or **Have** you **got** any brothers or sisters?, and **We haven't** a garden or **We haven't got** a garden.

The different use of **do** in the above-mentioned constructions influences a different choice of question tags (question phrases) added to sentences like *He has a brother*. The American variant may yield the sentence *He has a brother, doesn't he?*, whereas BE would produce *He has a brother, hasn't he?*

The interrogative form of **used to**, as in *He used to smoke* has always been a good example of discrepancy. It is only relatively recently that the difference started disappearing. AE makes the question form **Did** he **used to smoke?** whereas BE uses **Used** he **to smoke?** and **Did** he **used to smoke?** the latter form being a result of AE influence. The same applies to negative sentences where the forms in AE and BE are *He*

*didn't used to smoke* and *He used not to smoke* or *He didn't used to smoke*, respectively.

The cases discussed above show a preference in AE for using **do**, as opposed to British inversion of the existing elements. One example would prove the contrary, however. The negative of *let us* is *let's not* (AE) and *don't let us* (BE). *Don't let us* is rare in AE.

Examples: AE: *Let's not go there*; *Let's not do it*; BE: *Don't let us go there*, *Don't let us do it*.

The verb **do** exhibits one more difference. In BE it is superfluously used in structures like: *Have you seen her since? No ... How could I have done. Do* is meaningless here and possibly serves for emphatic purposes.

### 3. Infinitive

Some examples show that AE uses the infinitive with or without **to** whereas BE only with **to**. For instance, AE: *Let's go see him* versus BE: *Let's go to see him* or *Let's go and see him*. The American variety sounds to Englishmen archaic.

*It helped make the performance spectacular* is more typical of American usage. BE will have exactly the same construction or *It helped to make the performance spectacular*.

In AE sentences like *I'd like you to go there* and *I'd like you to love me* may be transformed into: *I'd like to have you go there* and *I'd like to have you love me*. British speakers would consider these incorrect.

In some cases AE allows both the **to** and a **verb** signifying change of place to be omitted. For example: *The cat wants in*, *She wants off* for *The cat wants to go in* and *She wants to get off*. In AE both sentences, with or without **to** + **verb** are possible. In BE only the latter examples are considered correct.

#### 4. Perfect Participle

In some cases in expressions of the type **to be + Perf. Participle** AE optionally deletes the **to be** group. Thus, for example: *I ordered her **to be replaced***, correct in both BE and AE, may be reduced in AE to: *I ordered her **replaced***. BE: *She wanted a conference **to be held*** may be in AE both: *She wanted a conference **to be held*** and *She wanted a conference **held***.

#### 5. The Subjunctive

The different use of the subjunctive constitutes one of the most often quoted examples of peculiarities concerning BE and AE grammar. Although the subjunctive mood is not of high frequency its different handling in AE and BE seems to be easily detectable. In AE the subjunctive is formed merely by means of the uninflected form of the verb. In BE, however, a combination of **should** and the infinitive is the most natural.

Examples:

AE	BE
I suggest <b>that you go</b>	I suggest <b>that you should go</b>
He urged <b>that we come</b> back to America	He urged <b>that we should come</b> back to America

#### 6. Phrasal Verbs

One of the characteristic features of AE is the frequent use of what are called phrasal verbs. These are combinations of a verb and a function word (or two function words) that may also function in English sentences as a preposition.

A phrasal verb is a semantic unit having a meaning

which often differs from the sum of the meanings of its individual parts. It is a grammatical unit which fulfills normal verb functions in English sentences and may or may not be followed by an object. Note the difference between verb + prepositional phrase and phrasal verb. The former can be exemplified by *We were talking over the fence*, where the preposition **over** is a part of the prepositional phrase **over the fence**. The latter will be, for example: *We must talk over this report*, where **talk over** means *discuss* and **over** constitutes a part of the phrasal verb **talk over**.

Phrasal verbs may consist of two (e. g., **talk over**) or three (e. g., **put up with**) elements. They may be separable or inseparable, i. e., the verb may or may not be separated from the preposition (the preposition which is a part of a phrasal verb is often referred to as a particle).

Relevant differences between AE and BE pertaining to phrasal verbs can be labeled under two headings:

- a) BE uses phrasal verbs differently from AE
- b) AE uses phrasal verbs which have no phrasal equivalent in BE.

Point a) may be exemplified by:

AE	BE	-M
do over <i>s</i>	do up <i>s</i>	redo
fill out <i>s</i>	fill in <i>s</i>	complete
fill in <i>s</i>		/a printed form/
set off <i>ins</i>	lead off, set off <i>ins</i>	start /a journey/
figure on <i>ins</i>	rely on <i>ins</i>	estimate, expect



come over <i>ins</i>	come round, <i>ins</i>	come /for a visit/
get around <i>ins</i>	get round <i>ins</i>	avoid, evade
get along with <i>ins</i>	get on with <i>ins</i>	be compatible with
come across with <i>ins</i>	come up with, <i>ins</i>	yield /somet- hing deman- ded/
gang up on <i>ins</i>	gang upon <i>ins</i>	conspire against

Point b) may be exemplified by:

AE	M
figure out <i>s</i>	interpret, understand
hold off <i>s</i>	delay, restrain
check out <i>ins</i>	leave a hotel
back up <i>ins</i>	move, backwards
come across <i>ins</i>	yield, produce
get through } <i>ins</i>	finish
be through }	
look for <i>ins</i>	expect
run over <i>ins</i>	go to visit casually
count in <i>s</i>	include

The phrasal verbs cited above that contribute to the differences between AE and BE are only a fraction of the vast corpus of two- and three-word verbs which are in common use in both AE and BE (although as was mentioned at the beginning AE uses them more frequently).

## Prepositions

There are various constructions which show that the distribution of prepositions in AE and BE is different. An example like AE: *knock on the door* and BE: *knock*

**at the door** does not indicate, however, that whenever **on** occurs in AE **at** does in BE. Instances of the different use of prepositions are indicative of preposition variations pertaining only to the cited examples and equivalent structures.

Prepositions which contribute markedly to the differences between the two varieties of English are the following:

**aside from** — In AE it may be used to mean *besides*, *apart from*, *in addition to*, e. g., *Aside from the first two pages I did not manage to read anything.*

**in back of** — In AE may be used to mean *behind*, e. g., *The car is standing (in) back of the house.* In BE only *behind* is possible in this context.

**by** — In some constructions in AE **by** may be used instead of **to** (both uses being correct). For example: *We went by the station to get a reservation* instead of *We went to the station to get a reservation.* In BE only the latter sentence is correct.

**for** — In AE versus *after* in BE in name for (BE: *name after*). For example, AE: *This university was named for him*; BE: *This university was named after him*; however, AE: *The child was named after (or for) his father.*

**in** — In AE **in** is often used where **into** in BE. In AE more often *Tom ran in the kitchen*, in BE more often *Tom ran into the kitchen.*

**inside of** — In AE it may be used instead of *within, in less than*, e. g., *I want you to be back **inside of** an hour.*

**on** — Where BE has **in** AE often has **on**, as in:

AE: *There are fifteen people **on** the team.*

BE: *There are fifteen people **in** the team.*

AE: *He has been **on** the police force for twenty years.*

BE: *He has been **in** the police force for twenty years.*

AE: *I live **on** Washington Street.*

BE: *I live **in** Washington Street.*

BE excludes **on** in some cases where it may occur in AE, e. g., AE: *I'll brush up **on** my French*, versus BE: *I'll brush up my French.*

American **on** may be replaced in BE. by **at**, e. g., AE: *Don't knock **on** the door*; BE: *Don't knock **at** the door.*

**out** — In AE **out** may be used instead of the British **out by**, e. g., AE: *We had to take the trunk **out** the servants' stairs*; BE: *We had to take the trunk **out by** the servants' stairs.*

**outside of** — In AE may be used in the sense of *besides, apart from, except*. For example: *I have not seen anything **outside of** the two most famous paintings.*

**over** — In AE it may be used instead of **about**, e. g., AE: *I was happy **over***

it or *I was happy about it*. BE uses only the latter variety.

**than** — AE may use **than** instead of **from** or **to** as in: *The red car is different **than** the white one*; BE: *The red car is different **from** the white one*, or *The red car is different **to** the white one*.

**through** — In AE *through* occurs in sentences like: *Monday **through** Friday*, meaning, ***from** Monday **until** Friday*. *Through* is never used in BE in that sense.

**with** — In *to visit a person* Americans often insert **with** producing sentences like: *We are accustomed to visiting **with** foreign diplomats*; *She has been away visiting **with** relatives in the south of the country*, etc. In *to talk to someone* AE may use **with** instead of *to* thus producing, for example: *I want to talk **with** him*.

### Missing preposition

In AE as opposed to BE some prepositions in certain word combinations may be dropped. A classical example is that of *Sunday, Monday*, etc., versus BE ***on** Sunday, **on** Monday*, etc. AE: *I met him Tuesday* will be BE: *I met him **on** Tuesday*.

Another example of a missing preposition in AE will be *She had a couple drinks* which is accepted in everyday speech without any reservations but is rare in written use.

In *Did you write to him?*, correct in both BE and

AE, **to** may be dropped in AE, the form being also *Did you write him?*

In some cases, however, AE may or may not use a preposition whereas BE has only one grammatical form, the one without preposition, e. g., AE: *She answered all **of** my questions*; BE and AE: *She answered all my questions*; AE: *All **of** these books are mine*; BE and AE: *All these books are mine*.

## Adjectives and Adverbs

The number of syntactic peculiarities pertaining to adjectives and adverbs is relatively small. The difference which is quoted very frequently is that of some adverbs that often have in AE the form of adjectives. For example: AE: *it's **real** good*, versus, BE: *it's **really** good*; AE: *it's **awful** nice*, versus, BE: *it's **awfully** nice*. This conversion in AE applies only to selected lexical items usually before adjectives.

Note: *it's **real** nice*, however *\*I **real** mean it*. Also, **real** and **awful** in these uses are highly informal and easy to use inappropriately.

AE may use **any place**, **some place**, **every place**, **no place** instead of *anywhere*, *somewhere*, *everywhere* *nowhere*, respectively. For instance, AE: *He will go **any place** she wishes*; AE: *Let's meet **some place** tomorrow evening*. In BE *anywhere*, *somewhere* etc., are used exclusively.

In AE **one time** may sometimes be used instead of the adverbial of time **once**, e. g., *One time in London I met a hippy of about twenty years old*. **Sometime** may occasionally, in informal speech be used in AE instead of *sometimes*, e. g., AE: *He makes a lot of jokes **sometime***.

Finally, it should be pointed out that British *backwards*, *forwards*, *westwards*, etc., are often realized in AE as *backward*, *forward*, *westward*, etc., the *s* element being dropped.

## Conjunctions

Differences pertaining to conjunctions are comparatively infrequent. They include, for example, the use of **except** in AE instead of **except that**, common in Britain. For instance, AE: *I didn't really know what I did except I was sure it was wrong*; BE: *I didn't really know what I did except that I was sure it was wrong*. The British variety is an alternative in AE.

Another difference is that of insertion or non-insertion of **that** in sentences like:

AE: *She doubted she could do anything about it.*

BE: *She doubted that she could do anything about it.*

AE: *It was the first indication there is something about it she'll hate.*

BE: *It was the first indication that there is something about it she'll hate.*

In both examples the British sentences are American alternatives.

## Pronouns

An essential difference concerning the use of pronouns is that of the impersonal form **one**, very often used in both BE and AE to express truths like *one has to eat in order to live* or *crossing the street one has to watch out* as well as any ideas or opinions with no reference to a particular person as the agent.

In sentences where the antecedent is **one** the pronoun used in AE is preferably **he** whereas in BE it is also **one**. For example: AE: *One never knows what he should do in such a situation*; BE: *One never knows what one should do in such a situation*.

The same combination of the pronouns **one** and **he** and the antecedent **one** applies to cognates of **one** and **he** — reflexive and possessive pronouns **himself**, **oneself**, **his** and **one's**. For example:

AE: *One always fools himself and his listeners in saying that it is possible to learn a foreign language within half a year*.

BE: *One always fools oneself and one's listeners in saying that it is possible to learn a foreign language within half a year*.

The sentence *What day is today?* (correct only in AE) versus BE: *What day is it today?* is another example of the differences in the usage of pronouns (BE **it**, AE no pronoun). No generalizations can be made since examples like the one quoted above are very infrequent.

## Articles

With regard to the article, the discrepancies are limited to only a few instances of the different distribution of **the** — article and **zero**-article (i. e., no article). In some cases AE takes **the** — article whereas BE takes **zero**-article. A classical example is that of AE: ... *in the hospital*, versus BE: ... *in hospital*;

AE: *I have never been in the hospital*.

BE: *I have never been in hospital*.

Also, in names of diseases AE may take the definite article **the** whereas BE has no article, e. g., AE: *He has the pneumonia*; BE: *He has pneumonia*.

On the other hand, there are structures which often show a lack of the article in AE whereas its occurrence in BE. This refers particularly to adverbials of time like *the day before yesterday*, *the day after tomorrow*, etc. These forms, correct in both BE and AE, may in AE be simplified to *day before yesterday*, *day after tomorrow*, etc. Thus American alternatives will occur in sentences like *I will meet you day after tomorrow*; *He moved here year before last*, etc. Another example is that of *all the morning* which is correct only in BE. The British alternative and the American form is *all morning*; AE and BE: *It's been cloudy all morning*; BE: *It's been cloudy all the morning*.

### Telling time

When telling time the Americans and the British have a number of differences which in most cases consist in using a different preposition. Here are some examples: an American will say either *it's three after twelve* or *it's three past twelve* whereas an Englishman only *it's three past twelve*. An American may say *it's ten (minutes) to seven*, *it's ten (minutes) of seven* or *it's ten (minutes) before seven*. An Englishman uses only the first variant. An American will say *it's getting on toward* (or *to*) *8 o'clock* and an Englishman will say *it's getting on for 8 o'clock*.

Typical preferences may be exemplified by the following sentences:

AE: *It's ten thirty.*

BE: *It's half past ten.*

AE: *I go to bed around (about) 11 o'clock.*

BE: *I go to bed at about 11 o'clock.*

AE: *It's five forty five.*

BE: *It's a quarter to six.*



The British do not seem to use *half a year*. Instead, they use *six months* which is also possible in AE. Americans, on the other hand, do not often use *it's half past five* preferring *it's five thirty* which is also correct in BE. Naturally, the main constructions which pertain to telling time remain the same.

## Word order

Word order in the two varieties of English is basically the same. One can find but a few examples which contribute to the differences. One is the adverb *too*, which in AE need not be placed only at the end of a sentence (as it is in BE) but also medially. Then, however, it does not, in fact, mean *also* but functions as a conjunction signifying *moreover*, *besides*, e. g., *I have been looking for you all over that place. Then, too, I have stopped a couple of people in the street to ask about you.*

Also, quite often, an Englishman would be astonished to come across the American *the Hudson River* because he will always refer to *the River Thames*.

Another example of word order discrepancies is that of *I can hardly do it* correct in both AE and BE. Americans, however, occasionally invert *can* and *hardly* yielding *I hardly can do it*.

## Tenses

One of the aspects of grammar, a possible area of divergence, which has always been neglected is that of the different tenses that appear in AE and BE with varying application. It must be emphasized, however,

that the tense variations discussed below fall within the framework of typical preferences with only casual instances of prescribing a given form to either of the varieties. Also, it should be kept in mind that the dissimilarities pointed out below refer in most cases to the spoken language, exclusively. The written language levels the differences making them hardly discernible.

### 1. *Present Tenses*

Random investigations carried out on the spoken language as well as an examination of selected texts reflecting natural speech show that AE tends to use Simple Past instead of Present Perfect, e. g., *He just came* instead of *He has just come*. Simple Present, Present Perfect Continuous and Present Continuous uses remain basically the same.

### 2. *Past Tenses*

Here, the use of Simple Past (in AE) instead of Past Perfect can be observed, e. g., AE: *After he came back home he ate dinner* instead of *After he had come ...* Until recently more cases of this kind of replacement could be noticed in AE. Presently, however, the same process can be seen in BE, the difference actually gradually disappearing.

Past Perfect Continuous is applied in the two varieties of English fundamentally on the same grammatical principles.

### 3. *Future Tenses*

No differences are conspicuous with regard to the Simple Future and Future Continuous Tenses. The only area of discrepancy is a Future Time Perfect whose use may alternate in AE with the Simple Present,

e. g., AE: *After you **have thought** it over, please let me know what you **decide*** or *After you **think** it over, please let me know what you **decide***. In BE only the former is correct.

Although individual sentences taken out of extended context are not always very well illustrative of the different handling of tense distribution in the two varieties, one simple conclusion may be drawn immediately. AE is willing to use simple tenses, i. e., Simple Past or Simple Present instead of compound tenses of the Perfect. BE seems to try to "catch up with" AE at least in some of the structures pointed out.

### **Reported speech**

AE tends to disregard the rules of sequence of tenses. Occurrences like: *He said he is feeling bad* or *She said today is Monday* are not rare in AE. Sporadic instances of this kind can also be recorded in BE, but they are comparatively infrequent. This distinction, also, primarily refers to the spoken language of educated speakers.

The discussion of differences pertaining to the grammatical structure of BE and AE presented above, is indicative of the following fact. AE, as opposed to BE, has tended:

1. to level variations within itself, e. g., **do** used for all kinds of questions with **have**.

2. to simplify the syntactic component, e. g., the distribution of tenses.

Obviously 1 and 2 are interrelated and, therefore, the general tendencies observed in AE can be labeled as aiming at linguistic freedom and economy.

## MORPHOLOGY

In comparison with the language components already presented, morphology exhibits the least number of dissimilarities relevant to our discussion. All of them are actually confined to the verb, in particular to its participial forms.

A definite difference is that of **gotten** which as an independent verb form is exclusively AE. AE **gotten** is used instead of BE **got** as a past participle of **get** in sentences like:

AE: *I have **gotten** used to it;*

BE: *I have **got** used to it;*

AE: *She has already **gotten** up;*

BE: *She has already **got** up.*

However, the difference disappears when;

1. **have got** means **have**, e. g., AE and BE: *I **have got** a big house;* and

2. **have got** means **must**, e. g., *We **have got** to do it right now.*

In AE, in colloquial speech **have got** meaning **have** or **must** is occasionally reduced to **got** (by a phonological loss), e. g., *I **got** a wonderful cat; We **got** to go now.*

A similar example is the past participle of **prove** which in AE may be either **proven** or **proved** (preferably **proven**) whereas BE tends to accept **proved** as the possibility.

The historically correct past participle of **strike** — **stricken** is more common in AE than in BE except in set phrases like **stricken blind** correct in both AE and BE.

Other examples of participles (or Simple Past forms) are, again, typical preferences. The list of items provided below includes words which can be treated in both varieties either as regular or irregular verbs. Classifying some forms under AE and others under BE indicates only that the mentioned forms are more frequent in the variety assigned to them.

AE	BE
learned	learnt
spelled	spelt
kneeled	kneelt
burned	burnt
dreamed	dreamt
dwelled	dwelt
knitted	knit
smelled	smelt
spilled	spilt

Thus, it may be seen that verbs like those listed above are treated in AE more often as regular and in BE as irregular. Exceptions are **dive** whose Simple Past form is **dove** or **dived** in AE and **dived** in BE, and **wed** whose Past Participle may be **wed** or **wedded** in AE and **wedded** in BE.

The remaining part of the verb system as well as the other parts of speech show no differences except for some isolated instances which, in the majority of cases, pertain to slang or the language of uneducated speakers.

## CONCLUSION

The fundamental purpose of this handbook has been to indicate significant differences between the two main varieties of English — British and American. The following aspects of the language have been discussed: *pronunciation, stress, intonation, spelling, vocabulary, phraseology, grammar, and morphology.*

It may be easily deduced from the presentation that the majority of essential differences between the two varieties of English can be detected in pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary. A number of cases have had to be discussed in terms of preferences, in this way the amount of actual dissimilarities diminishing.

Languages are always changing. This fundamental linguistic truth can be observed when a historical study of any language is undertaken. Some lexical items become extinct and are gradually replaced by new words. With the rapid development of civilization new concepts and ideas are created. New words and expressions are coined to refer to them. Due to a number of phonetic laws the sound system of a language also undergoes certain changes. Grammatical rules are violated, in this way giving way to new ones which after some time become standard. All of these changes operate in various languages in a rather unpredictable way although certain modifications can be foreseen.

All this brings us to the obvious conclusion that BE

and AE have also been and will be exposed to the various linguistic changes mentioned above. Therefore, many of the differences listed in the foregoing chapters may very soon disappear. The kinds of new discrepancies and similarities appearing in the future will entirely depend upon the natural development of the language as it is spoken and written. What differences and similarities can be expected is a difficult question to answer. It is easier to handle it in terms of the future of English.

The English language is spoken at present as a native language by approximately 270 million speakers spread over four continents. The number of speakers of English as a second language is estimated to be around 135 million.

The number of speakers is constantly increasing. If we take into account that English literature, literature in English, English newspapers and movies are available in almost every country of the world, it will become obvious that English is undoubtedly an international language of utmost significance.

In view of these facts as well as purely linguistic research it seems likely that the number of differences between BE and AE will not be increasing. An entire split which would bring to existence entirely different, mutually unintelligible languages seems completely unlikely. One of the reasons for thinking so is the fact that the number of discrepancies between the two varieties of English constitute only a small fraction of the whole body of the language and in fact are overwhelmed by the abundance of similarities which still predominate in a convincing way. The opinion expressed here is shared by many outstanding scholars who are professionally concerned with this subject.

In 1964 Professor Albert H. Marekwardt of

Princeton University, USA, and Professor Randolph Quirk of University College, London, met in order to discuss the various aspects of BE and AE which show discrepancies of forms. One of the conclusions which they came to in their interesting discussion was that "the two varieties of English have never been so different as people imagined, and the dominant tendency, for several decades now, has clearly been that of convergence and even greater similarity"<sup>53</sup>.

Nine years later, in 1973, this statement becomes more and more valid. It seems almost certain that a situation in which Americans and Englishmen would have to use dictionaries in order to understand one another will never ensue.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In A. H. Marckwardt's, *American, English.*, p. 49. According to J. J. Lamberts, *A Short Introduction to English Usage.*, Marckwardt's explanation would have to be modified. The Dutch word for *cheese* is *kaas* not *kees*. *Kees*, however, is a nick name for Cornelius, and John Cornelius was a familiar combination. It, therefore, seems likely that Jan Kees had nothing to do with *cheese*.

<sup>2</sup> quoted from H. L. Mencken's, *The American Language.*, p. 103

<sup>3</sup> H. L. Mencken, *op. cit.*, p. 103

<sup>4</sup> taken from A. J. Bronstein, *The pronunciation of American English.*, p. 134

<sup>5</sup> C. Graf, H. Spitzbardt, *Amerikanisches Englisch.*, p. 23

<sup>6</sup> taken from A. C. Gimson, *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English.*, p. 197

<sup>7</sup> occasionally also AE

<sup>8</sup> occasionally also AE

<sup>9</sup> you can also hear *aɪə* in the US and *iə* in Britain, but *iə* in AE and *aɪə* in BE are definitely more common

<sup>10</sup> you can also hear *naɪə* in the US and *niə* in Britain, but *niə* in AE and *naɪə* in BE are definitely more common.

<sup>11</sup> another common pronunciation of the word is *proʊgres*

<sup>12</sup> H. L. Mencken, *op. cit.*, p. 480

<sup>13</sup> only when nouns

<sup>14</sup> they are differently pronounced; BE *aluminium* [æliuˈmɪnjəm] AE *aluminum* [əluˈmɪnəm]

<sup>15</sup> BE *bill* (money you pay, e.g., at a restaurant) is often rendered in AE as *check*.

<sup>16</sup> referring to papers that have to be filled out, usually used in plural

<sup>17</sup> *grilled* is also used in AE but it frequently means food *prepared in the open air*

<sup>19</sup> The difference refers only to interurban trips.

<sup>20</sup> In BE both expressions are used. *Business suit* is more formal *lounge suit* is more informal

<sup>21</sup> In BE *cereal* is not the same as *porridge*. *Cereal* is usually *cornflakes* and *porridge* — *hot oats*.

<sup>22</sup> In BE (and also in AE) *clerk* is a person employed in a bank, office, shop, etc., to keep records and accounts, copy letters, etc.

<sup>23</sup> In BE a *cracker* is a special kind of biscuit.

<sup>24</sup> In Britain *corn* may be grain in general

<sup>25</sup> *domestic mail* — within the US; *local mail* — within the same city

<sup>26</sup> The word *autumn* is also used in AE sometimes.

<sup>27</sup> *Arrive at a solution* is certainly used in AE, too. This entry only suggests that the phrasal verb *figure out* is not used in BE.

<sup>28</sup> In many cases *main floor* is also used in AE (for larger buildings)

<sup>29</sup> In BE *to fix* usually means *to install*.

<sup>30</sup> In BE *French fries* and *chips* differ. *French fries* are thin and *chips* are thick.

<sup>31</sup> In BE *generator* is used in a power plant, *dynamo* in a car. In AE — vice versa.

<sup>32</sup> In AE *guess* and *figure* may mean *think*, e. g., *I guess you are right* or *I figure it's expensive*. In BE *guess* and *figure* are not (or extremely rarely) used in this sense. *Think* as well as its synonyms: *suppose*, *presume*, etc., occur in both AE and BE.

<sup>33</sup> In BE *hall* is used for that part of house next to the entrance where you leave your coat.

<sup>34</sup> In AE *highball* may also mean *whisky* and *ginger ale*.

<sup>35</sup> In BE *hijacker* is used for planes only.

<sup>36</sup> In AE *shooting* is used also, but not in the sense of *hunting*.

<sup>37</sup> In AE the word *caretaker* is also used sometimes.

<sup>38</sup> In AE *timber* is also used. It means *unprocessed wood*.

<sup>39</sup> *Penitentiary* is a large state prison; *pen* — informal

<sup>40</sup> In AE *pitcher* is used for *cream*, *milk*, *beer* and the like. A *pitcher* in BE is something considerably larger.

<sup>41</sup> In England *principal* is also used but only with higher education — not secondary school.

<sup>42</sup> In AE only attributive, as in *Railway Express*.

<sup>44</sup> *Neat* is much more common in Britain.

<sup>45</sup> *Boater* in BE means a special kind of straw hat, one that is stiffened.

<sup>46</sup> In BE *subway* is also used with the meaning *underground passage*.

<sup>47</sup> see American *hood*

<sup>48</sup> In BE a *billion* is a million millions, whereas in AE it is what the British call a *milliard* – a thousand millions.

<sup>49</sup> see American *undershirt*

<sup>50</sup> Both *vomit* and *to be sick* are used in AE and BE. In BE, however, *to be sick* means *to vomit* and in AE *to be sick* is *to be ill* in BE.

<sup>51</sup> In fact what is meant here is H. L. Mencken's, *The American Language* supplemented, abridged and with annotations and new material by R. McDavid in 1963

<sup>52</sup> Some of the expressions listed in a), b) and c) border on slang. Nevertheless, they are current in everyday conversation and therefore creeping slowly into the widely accepted colloquial vocabulary.

<sup>53</sup> Some authors may have thought this to be a good reason for neglecting the subject.

<sup>54</sup> This surely refers only to the structures mentioned.

<sup>55</sup> A. H. Marckwardt, R. Quirk, *A Common Language*, p. 5

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British and American English—differences pertaining to pronunciation, stress and intonation.

You will always hear the American speaker first, then the British voice.

## Part I. Pronunciation

1. AE front low *æ* versus BE back low *ɑ*.

Examples:

plant, grass, dance, east, command, chance, advance, can't, aunt, path, pass, past, half, fast, last, after, answer, ask, bath, grant, draft, grasp, glance, blast, brass.

2. AE back low *ɑ* versus BE higher back *ɔ*.

Examples:

box, stop, rod, God, pot, not, top, bottom, got, lock, hot, lot, plot, dollar, college, doctor, rock, obvious, body, common, conflict, nod, novel, bother, slot, shot

3. AE back low *ɔ* versus BE higher back and more rounded *ɔ*:

Examples:

all, saw, bought, taught, talk, law, ball, call, raw, draw, fall, hall, tall, yawn, bawl, lawn, paw, claw, broad, strawberry, coleslaw

4. AE central *ɜ* versus BE lower central *ʌ*.

Examples:

worry, hurry, courage, current, curry, flurry, surrey

5. AE diphthong *ou* versus BE diphthong *əʊ*.

Examples:

soak, broke, coke, going, no, poker, rope, dope, thrown, abode, load, nose, code, low, wrote, lonely, alone, quote, note, remote

**6. AE monophthong i versus BE diphthong ai**

**Examples:**

specialization, generalization, civilization, characterization  
crystalization, nasalization, fertile, hostile, futile, agile, fragile, mobile

**7. AE diphthongs versus BE unstressed or weakly stressed monophthongs**

**Examples:**

simultaneously, acrimony, albino, anti-, candidate, brocade

**8. AE monophthong u versus BE diphthong ju.**

**Examples:**

due, dew, duke, duty, suit, suitable, Tuesday, new, knew, student, stupid, nude, numerous, studio, steward, news

**9. AE voiced t versus BE voiceless t.**

**Examples:**

letter, butter, bitter, better, cutters, writing, get it, I got it, beetle, subtle, little, kettle, bottle, twenty, wanted, at another station, if it is easy

**10. AE dark i versus BE clear i.**

**Examples:**

lamp, luck, look, ladder, leak, leap, lend, lack, lump

**11. AE r-colored vowels versus BE non-colored vowels,**

**Examples:**

certain, blurr, curb, bird, curve, turn, burn, learn, lurk, third, sure, fork, lard, car, bar, garden, gorgeous, blackboard, cord, sword, north, murder, sir, beard, beer, bear, care, verge, burden, diner, father, mother, brother, loser, color, doer, sugar, Western

**12. Irregular differences.**

**Examples:**

asthma, advertisement, blouse, Berkeley, borough, clerk, docile, derby, either, epoch, leisure, lieutenant, neither, process, progress, suggest, shone, schedule, tomato, vase, z

## **Part II. Stress**

**1. AE secondary stress versus BE weak stress**

**Examples:**

allegory, arbitrary, blackberry, customary, dictionary, defamatory, dormitory, extraordinary, hereditary, literary, laboratory, military, monastery, necessary, reactionary, territory

2. In AE the first syllable stressed more often and in BE the second (or the third).

Examples:

address/noun/, ancillary, cigarette, dictate, donate, inquiry, research, resource, romance, translate

3. In AE the second syllable, stressed more often and in BE the first

Examples:

aristocrat, beret, cafe, complex(adj), crochet, elongate, frontier, harass (verb).

### Sentences.

1. It's a beautiful country with many large lakes.
2. Because of the warm and sunny weather oranges grow very well here.
3. My hobby is collecting stamps.
4. The hardest thing to learn is to be a good loser.

### Text 1.

An earthquake comes like a thief in the night, without warning. It was necessary, therefore, to invent instruments that neither slumbered nor slept. Some devices were quite simple. One, for example, consisted of rods of various lengths and thicknesses which would stand up on end like ninepins. When a shock came it shook the rigid table upon which these stood. If it were gentle, only the more unstable rods fell. If it were severe, they all fell. Thus the rods by falling, and by the direction in which they fell, recorded for the slumbering scientist the strength of a shock that was too weak to waken him and the direction from which it came.

(Alexander L. G., *Fluency in English*, p. 172)

### Text 2.

It is fairly clear that the sleeping period must have some function, and because there is so much of it the function would seem to be important. Speculations about its nature have been going on for literally thousands of years, and one odd finding that makes the problem puzzling is that it looks very much as if sleeping is not simply a matter of giving the body a rest, 'Rest', in terms of muscle relaxation and so on, can be achieved by a brief period lying, or even sitting down. The body's tissues are self-repairing and self-restoring to a degree, and



function best when more or less continuously active. In fact a basic amount of movement occurs during sleep which is specifically concerned with preventing muscle inactivity.

(Alexander L. G., *op. cit.*, p. 49)

### Text 3.

When anyone opens a current account at a bank, he is lending the bank money, repayment of which he may demand at any time, either in cash or by drawing a cheque in favor of another person. Primarily, the banker-customer relationship is that of debtor and creditor — who is which depending on whether the customer's account is in credit or is overdrawn. But, in addition to that basically simple concept, the bank and its customer owe a large number of obligations to one another. Many of these obligations can give rise to problems and complications but a bank customer, unlike, say, a buyer of goods, cannot complain that the law is loaded against him.

(Alexander L. G., *op. cit.*, p. 75)

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